

PROTO-DIMENSIONS™

Sourcebook, Volume 1

Ted Kocot
and
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Wiseman



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Ted Kocot and Loren Wiseman

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DARK CONSPIRACY



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Houston peered over the sights of her XM-26 into the dimness of the hall, finger on the trigger, scanning for targets as she had been taught. There was no sign of pursuit—they were safe for the moment. She turned toward the center of the room, just in time to see the black cube which Fuller and Scirocco had been experimenting with shimmer and then swell, spilling its darkness toward her. For an instant, Houston could not make her eyes focus on the unearthly blackness. A primordial urge to flee came over her, but she swallowed hard and mastered it.

"Well, this looks like our lucky day," Fuller said as he stepped quickly back from the shimmering projection. "This is one of their dimension walking machines! With this we can put more hurt on 'em in a few days than we have in the last six months."

Houston was skeptical. "What good does that do us? We don't have the first clue where that thing leads to."

Scirocco walked out from behind the inky projection and walked over to join his companions. "I've set it to match the pattern we saw the onlon-head use earlier, so it'll probably be safe on the other side."

"Probably!" Houston exclaimed, "Don't you think we ought to have more of a plan than just waltzing merrily into a lake of molten sulphur or whatever's on the other end?"

"We know the ETs—at least the humanoid ones—come out of the same type of environment we do. They aren't going to go somewhere that will kill them outright, and we all saw Bigdome step into the field without a protective suit or anything. We'll just go in there and take a quick look around. If whatever's on the other side is too big for us to handle, we just jump back into the field and bail out. Come on, we have to hurry before the field shuts down."

Scirocco drew his XM-22 and walked into the field, vanishing from sight in an instant. Fuller gestured for Houston to follow, and then stepped into the field himself.

It wasn't until Houston was completely engulfed by the device's field that she wondered how it would know when to retrieve them, but by that time it was too late. An instant later, the black projection collapsed back into the smaller cube and there was no trace of Scirocco, Houston or Fuller left on the Earth.

INTRODUCTION

Until now, little has been said about the proto-dimensions. In **Dark Conspiracy**, it was learned that the Dark Masters were spawned outside of our own universe, and that they were the implacable enemies of humanity. We also found that the proto-dimensions could be used for rapid travel—a dimension walker could leave the Earth at one point and reappear, moments later, miles away. Later, in other **Dark Conspiracy** products, more information was revealed.

There were, however, plenty of unanswered questions left regarding the proto-dimensions. Abstract questions like, "Where did the proto-dimensions come from?" and more utilitarian ones such as, "Can a dark elf use Dimension Walk skill to enter or escape from a locked room?"

These questions, and many others, will be answered in this book. If you are a **Dark Conspiracy** referee you will be able to incorporate the proto-dimensions into your campaign with relative ease. If you are a player, your character can now take the battle to the enemy's backyard.

Format

The two primary objectives of this book are to answer the "what if" questions that dimension walking raises and to show referees how to use proto-dimensions while maintaining play balance in their campaigns. **Dark Conspiracy** would be much less enjoyable if a group of PCs without dimension walking capability could not defeat a much weaker group of dark elves who could enter the proto-dimensions. The dark elves should not be able to effortlessly elude a tracker, escape from an ambush, or kill the PCs using their special talents. Of course this doesn't mean that dimension walking would not be helpful in the execution of such tasks, just that it won't make them automatically successful.

This sourcebook is divided into two sections: The first details the metaphysics of the proto-dimensions and gives a general explanation of how they are related to the Earth and to one another. It also gives more detailed descriptions of the various methods of inter-dimensional travel, explaining how interdimensional travel is accomplished and the penalties of failure.



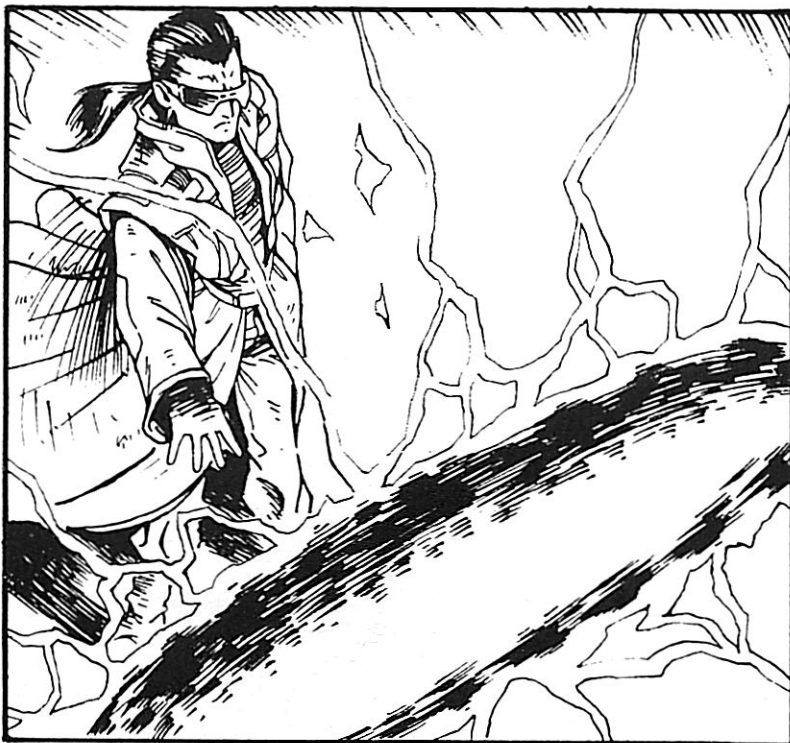
The second section is a listing of 12 proto-dimensions, some of which you may recognize from *Minion Nation* or the *Dark Conspiracy* novels, others of which are entirely new. Each of these proto-dimensions is ready for use in your campaign. Some of the proto-dimension descriptions also contain ideas for adventures which can be added to your existing *Dark Conspiracy* campaign, adventures which will illustrate some of the rewards and the dangers of walking the proto-dimensions.

Sharp-eyed readers will note that we did not include all of the proto-dimensions mentioned in *Dark Conspiracy* products—we have to leave something for later volumes, after all. Also, temporal proto-dimensions mentioned in *Minion Hunter* are conspicuous by their absence from this book. The bulk of information which absolutely had to be included in the *Proto-Dimensions Sourcebook, Volume I* did not leave enough space to supply the details a topic like the temporal proto-dimensions demands, and we felt that inadequate discussion of these would be worse than no explanation at all. We will deal with the temporal proto-dimensions in a later product.

A Caution

Referees will find themselves making more judgment calls when dealing with the proto-dimensions than with other topics. The reason for this is that *Dark Conspiracy* players will not have any real-life experiences to which they can compare their characters' interactions with the proto-dimensions. For example, the vehicle rules in *Dark Conspiracy* never once state that a car cannot be used to travel up the side of a building, yet players never seriously suggest that they want their PCs to attempt such an action. We all know that you won't get very far if you try to drive a car up a skyscraper. But what if you tried to dimension walk from the street to an office on the 58th floor of the same skyscraper? Would you get there? Would you get anywhere? There is nothing in everyday experience that answers these questions. This book is intended to fill in that information gap.

Referees should always be on guard against players who try to exploit the the proto-dimensions. Dimension walking is a powerful ability, but those who possess it are by no means invincible. The proto-dimensions are highly unforgiving of overconfidence, willful ignorance, and poor planning.



A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

While most of the specialized language in this volume is either self-explanatory or is defined as it comes up, there are certain words and phrases which are not used in the same way that they are used in everyday conversation. Also, we are redefining or refining several concepts from the *Dark Conspiracy* rules book, which means that even experienced referees will want to take note. A short glossary (on page 135) has been included to make using this book easier. Readers may want to refer to this glossary before reading the main body of the book.

THE D20 SYSTEM

This sourcebook includes an appendix (pages 137-139) covering the basics of the new D20 system as contained in the *PC Booster Kit* and the *Empathic Sourcebook* (and also in *Traveller: The New Era* and *Twilight: 2000*, 2nd edition, version 2.2). Those not already conversant with this system will want to familiarize themselves with it before attempting to use any of the proto-dimensions in this volume, and should proceed to it before reading any of the other rules. Others may wish to take a quick look after reading the other rules in the first section.

THE META-VERSE





The universe as we know it is (in *Dark Conspiracy*) a portion of a *meta-universe* (or *meta-verse* for short), which is composed of three parts: the *interstices*, the *universe* (as we know it), and the *proto-dimensions*. The basic operating principles of this meta-verse are called *meta-physics*. A clear mental image of the meta-universe and its associated meta-physics is crucial for referees who intend to use the proto-dimensions in their campaigns.

META-PHYSICS

If the proto-dimensions could be seen from Earth, they would all seem to physically overlap the universe and one another. If the proto-dimensions could be seen from the interstices (also known as the astral proto-dimension), a very different picture would emerge. From either of these vistas, the proto-dimensions appear to be small bubbles of order in a sea of chaos. These two images, when taken together, explain all interdimensional occurrences. Transdimensional travel is not like regular travel at all, since the proto-dimensions are no real distance from Earth (or from one another), but paradoxically there is an interdimensional sea which the traveller must cross. A single step takes the dimension walker into another dimension but, at the same time, the journey often feels as exhausting as a walk of many kilometers.

Before going any further, however, we must discuss the three basic components of the meta-verse: the interstices, the universe, and the proto-dimensions.

The Interstices

The *interstices* are the foundation of the meta-verse. They are the sea of disorder in which the birth of the universe occurred, and in which the universe and the proto-dimensions now float. Whether the universe continues to expand until it is infinitely dispersed or collapses back into a singularity like the one which gave rise to the Big Bang, the interstices will remain. The interstices permeate each of the proto-dimensions. They are not a proto-dimension in themselves, although characters can travel to them (sometimes voluntarily, sometimes not).

From the interstices, locations in both the universe and any of the proto-dimensions can be seen. These locations appear as shadowy, translucent forms, much as they do to mystics who are project-

ing their minds into the astral proto-dimension (see page 104 of the *Empathic Sourcebook*). This is not at all surprising. The interstices are, in fact, identical to the astral proto-dimension. The only difference between the two is the way in which they are experienced. When mystics journey into the astral proto-dimension, they send only their minds. Dimension walkers in the interstices are not separated from their physical form (much to their regret—the interstices are not very hospitable to humans and are not easily exited). The interstices will be discussed in more detail in their own chapter, beginning on page 27.

The Universe

Billions of years ago, the interstices were completely homogeneous; then a fiery cataclysm known as the Big Bang gave birth to the universe. This early universe was nothing like the one we know today. It was highly energetic and inconceivably chaotic. It was hotter than the core of the hottest star, but no stars existed. Atoms did not exist—in fact, the sub-atomic particles from which they are made had yet to be formed. The laws of physics were yet to come. In fact, some scientists theorize that this primordial universe had 40 or more distinct dimensions. This primitive universe did not last long. In less than a hundred-millionth of a second, causality was established, quarks were formed, and the dimensions in excess of the four (three spatial and one temporal) we know today collapsed into virtual nothingness. The universe began to expand, matter began to coalesce and stars began to form. The rest is history.

The universe is self-consistent. Entropy is never reversed and, for better or worse, time always deposits us in the future, never the past.

The Proto-Dimensions

Unlike the universe, the proto-dimensions were not created in the Big Bang. The majority of the proto-dimensions were formed when the universe began to expand. Like a ship on the ocean, the passage of the universe through what could be deemed an interdimensional sea left a vast wake. In this wake—a wake made up of waves of possibility in a sea of chaos—the proto-dimensions were forged. They are irrevocably bound to our universe as echoes are to the



sounds which gave them birth. They are reflections of our reality given form. Some proto-dimensions, however, were forged in the deaths of prior universes. The meta-verse has spawned more than one universe, and the present one has predecessors. What force destroyed these other universes is unknown. Some minion hunters theorize that the Dark Masters are responsible for their downfall. Others suggest that the breakdown of these prior universes is the event that created the Dark Masters. Still others hold that the cycle of the universes is unrelated to the Darklings, and beyond their control. We will probably never know for sure.

Models and Analogies: A clear, unambiguous explanation of what the proto-dimensions are is not an easy thing to come by. Their existence isn't a part of the four dimensions that humans experience in their day-to-day lives. Many models are applied to the proto-dimensions, but none of them is completely accurate. The cosmological model in which other dimensions exist "above" and "below" the universe in a series of nested shells does not concur with the nature of the proto-dimensions and their inferiority to the universe. No model in which our dimension is a great sphere surrounded by a sea of tiny proto-dimensional bubbles explains how an empath walks through the dimensional barriers.

For those first learning of the proto-dimensions, one of the best analogies is a mystical one, taught to many empaths during their initial empathic training. The analogy asks the student to picture a long string of white beads. Each bead symbolizes a moment of time or a point of space. In this representation, the passage of time is little more than moving from bead to bead—away from the end of the string which is the past, and toward the end which is the future. People go from one bead to another and never notice the interruptions between the pieces of their universe.

Next, the analogy asks the student to imagine a different string of beads. It is made, in part, with the same white beads, and so the denizens of this universe still step from one white bead to the next. The difference is that there is a small red bead strung between each of the white ones. The red beads remain unnoticed by this universe's inhabitants, who can only travel from one white bead to the next. Whatever dwells within the red beads, it cannot interact with the universe represented by the white beads unless it could take a half step and,

instead of moving from one red bead to another, move to a white bead.

Of course there could be an infinite number of other colored beads between the white ones. The string is the meta-verse, the white beads the universe of Earth, and the colored beads the various proto-dimensions.

Physical Laws

The fundamental physical laws in many proto-dimensions are not the same as those of Earth. In some proto-dimensions, they aren't even the same physical laws which were in force there an hour before. Some proto-dimensions dispense with such niceties as causality and stability. In some, the past is as flexible as the future and is constantly in flux. In others, there is no past as we know it, much less an immutable, self-consistent one.

These instabilities make interdimensional travel a risky proposition at best, and they are only one of the dangers which face a dimension walker. The environments found in many of the proto-dimensions are nothing like Earth's. Seas of lava, skies of chlorine, and mountains of methane ice wait to mercilessly slay the unprepared dimensional walk. As if that were not enough, the proto-dimensions are also the home the mysterious and malevolent Dark Masters, the vastly powerful Dark Lords (their lieutenants), and the majority of their Dark Minions.

TYPES OF PROTO-DIMENSIONS

The proto-dimensions can be divided into three broad categories: fragmentary proto-dimensions, halflands, and splinterlands. These categories are loosely based on the level at which causality functions in the proto-dimension in question, and are provided as a rough indicator of the complexity level of each proto-dimension. These categories are not too tightly defined, so it is possible for an individual proto-dimension to sit in a grey area between one classification and another.

In addition to these three categories, there is a fourth type of proto-dimension, the quantum proto-dimension, that is a subcategory of each category.

Fragmentary Proto-Dimensions

The fragmentary proto-dimensions are the most unnatural of proto-dimensions, and are in some senses



proto-proto-dimensions. They are often quite small and always very strange. At best, the goings on in a fragmentary dimension defy most or all physical laws. Fragmentary proto-dimensions are the easiest to describe, and can usually be summed up in a few sentences. Two examples (Wax and Angle) are included in sidebars in this chapter (see page 10). The elemental proto-dimensions that sorcerers occasionally draw upon are, for the most part, fragmentary proto-dimensions.

Not all fragmentary dimensions are reflections of the universe in an odd medium. Angle, a world of geometric shapes, doesn't resemble anything in this universe, except in the most general fashion.

There are usually no native life forms in a fragmentary dimension, but occasionally they are populated by life forms of an elemental nature, or creatures that have been transplanted there from other proto-dimensions and have managed to survive.

Pocket Proto-Dimensions: The pocket proto-dimensions or closet proto-dimensions are a subset of fragmentary proto-dimensions. These extremely small proto-dimensions are created by "pinching off" a few cubic meters of space-time, and isolating it as its own separate "bubble" in the seas of the interstices. This can be accomplished only by extremely powerful empathic or technological powers (such as the gateway controller in *Nightsider*), and is not something very many PCs can hope to accomplish. Such pocket proto-dimensions can normally only be entered from one location, usually the point from which they were originally "pinched off." If the entrance to such a pocket proto-dimension is sealed from the outside, they make excellent "prison cells" (this is how they are used in *Nightsider*, for example), because once the entrance is sealed, it cannot be unsealed from the inside. Except for the entrance, such proto-dimensions are impossible to leave, even using the most powerful Dimension Walk skills (they are "infinitely sticky"—see page 92 of the Gothic proto-dimension).

Space-time is so warped in these pocket proto-dimensions that time inside them passes very slowly (if at all). The energy available inside them is small, as well, and such pocket proto-dimensions are usually rather chilly (temperature inside one seldom exceeds 50°F/10°C). These two factors make them useful as "stasis boxes" for long-term storage (one might con-



sider them to be a very efficient, very expensive, and very hard-to-get refrigerator).

Halflands

Halflands are like the fragmentary proto-dimensions, but are less surreal. They are a better simulation of reality than the fragmentary dimensions, but even so, they would never be confused with the real universe. These sub-real qualities will remind many minion hunters of scenes from their nightmares.

A typical halfland is Gothic (more fully described beginning on page 90). Gothic is an endless castle with thrones, tapestries, ornate suits of armor, and tables laden with cornucopian feasts. Of course, castles, complete with all the trimmings, have been built on Earth, but the stone walls and torch sconces of Gothic were not fashioned by human, or even Darkling, hands. Characters who wander through Gothic will eventually realize that there is no world outside of the endless castle which they arrived in. Every door opened reveals more rooms, staircases, or long, drafty corridors lit by eternally burning torches.

There are often life forms to be found in the halflands but they are virtually never sentient. Often they are mindless killers (either living or machine). Other times they are little more than replicas of some Earthly life form, an exact duplicate physically but somehow inferior.



Wax

Name: Wax

Type: Fragmentary

Discontinuity: 2

Assimilation Effect Value: Special

Wax (mentioned in the Dark Conspiracy novel *Evil Triumphant* by Michael A. Stackpole) looks as if a life-sized, wax sculpture of some place on the Earth was heated almost to its melting point moments before the characters arrived. The ground is covered in a gloppy, half-congealed layer of wax. Wax buildings lean at odd angles and threaten to collapse at any moment. Inanimate wax people melt into growing puddles of liquid wax, sagging wax birds perch on drooping wax tree limbs. The whole proto-dimension contains nothing but air and wax, no other kind of matter is present.

Of course Wax never could have developed naturally. No simple change in physical law could account for every bit of material in the dimension being made of wax. Even more puzzling than the question "where did all the wax come from?" is the question "How did it come to be shaped like people, houses, and trees?" The Darklings didn't do it—they couldn't have. It is all far too perfect. Wax simply exists, an echo of Earth in a world of nothing but wax.

Wax has no assimilation damage value as such, but assimilation is very damaging: upon assimilation, everything becomes wax. Returning an assimilated object to Earth will halt the process, but the object must re-assimilate to Earth before it will return to its former material. Care must be taken not to damage the object in its wax state, because this damage will be reflected in its original state. The effect on living tissue is not pleasant.

Angle

Name: Angle

Type: Fragmentary

Discontinuity: 3

Assimilation Effect Value: 30

Angle is a proto-dimension of geometric shapes, and looks like it has been laid out with a compass and a ruler. There are no compound curves or irregular lines anywhere in Angle—everything is formed from three-dimensional geometric solids: spheres, cones, pyramids, cubes, and irregular polygons. Hills and mountains are cones, domes, or pyramids; the rivers are jagged, zigzag gashes through a landscape made up of conjoined irregular polygons.

All of the components of Angle are brightly colored in sparkling, jewel-like colors, so that everything seems to be made of cut glass. Angle has no native life forms, but visitors can occasionally find assimilated non-native life. Assimilation to Angle converts compound curves and irregular surfaces into features more suited to Angle. This process is usually deadly for living things.

Splinterlands

The splinterlands are consistent, permanent worlds. They are still inferior to the Earth, but are as close of a simulation as can be found in the proto-dimensions. Splinterlands are the most *real* of the proto-dimensions. While the other types of proto-dimensions can be thought of as little more than a weird environment, the splinterlands are usually as well developed and as complex as the Earth. Instead of being defined by their environment only, as the other types of proto-dimensions tend to be, the splinterlands are primarily defined by the events that have occurred there.

Consider the Plaguelands (more fully described beginning on page 110). Originally this was a very Earth-like proto-dimension with tribes of simple humanoids who hunted the large mammals which lived there, built simple thatch dwellings, and made primitive tools of stone and wood. This idyllic lifestyle was shattered when a Dark Lord with an affinity for parasites discovered the proto-dimension.

The story of the Plaguelands is not remarkable. The vast majority of the splinterlands were once primeval, Earth-like places—forests, jungles, and prairies—until the Darklings found them. The remarkable splinterlands are the ones which have not been overrun by the Darklings.

Off-Ramp is an example of a proto-dimension that is in the fuzzy area between halfland and splinterland. Off-Ramp is a piece of a proto-dimension that was broken into fragments as a result of a titanic (and poorly understood) struggle, as explained in *Nightsider*.

QUANTUM PROTO-DIMENSIONS

The quantum proto-dimensions are the proto-dimensions which are described on page 235 of *Dark Conspiracy* and are the undeveloped proto-dimensions discussed on page 77 of *Empathic Sourcebook*. Within their boundaries, time and distance may be stretched or compressed, giving them a certain degree of utility to minion hunters who possess the Dimension Walk skill and need to be somewhere else in a hurry or who wish to accelerate the healing process. With this added utility, however, comes an increased chance of encountering Darklings who are also using the quantum proto-dimensions for rapid transit.



The quantum proto-dimensions are not an individual proto-dimension, but are, instead, a whole subclass of the proto-dimensions. Each proto-dimension and the Earth has a number of potential quantum proto-dimensions associated with it. If the proto-dimensions are the reflections of Earth, then the quantum proto-dimensions are the shadows of the proto-dimensions that they are linked to. A quantum proto-dimension shares many of the same characteristics as its parent proto-dimension. Both dimensions will have the same discontinuity and physics shift, if any. (See pages 18 and 19 for a further discussion of these topics.) Environmental effects will be the same in a quantum proto-dimension as they are in the dimension to which it is linked.

The quantum proto-dimensions take their name from two strange effects that travellers there have observed. First, there is the nature of these dimensions' modification factors. There are, for example, quantum proto-dimensions that are stretched/compressed by a factor of 10 and others that are stretched/compressed by a factor of about 25. However, there do not seem to be any at any value between the two. Like the electron orbitals discovered by the first quantum physicists, the quantum proto-dimensions seem to have no in-betweens.

The other effect is this: When there is not an empath within a quantum proto-dimension, that proto-dimension appears to collapse in on itself and literally ceases to exist. Any inanimate object or non-empathic life form that is in a quantum proto-dimension when it collapses falls into the interstices.

The geography or topology of a quantum proto-dimension will strongly resemble that of the proto-dimension to which it is linked. Earth's quantum proto-dimensions, for example, resemble Earth, but on a different scale, as discussed below.

Because the quantum proto-dimensions are much more directly linked to the proto-dimensions which spawned them, it is impossible to move into a quantum proto-dimension from anywhere but the one proto-dimension it is linked to or to move from that quantum proto-dimension into any other proto-dimension besides the one to which it is linked. Even moving from one quantum proto-dimension to another that is attached to the same proto-dimension is not possible without a brief side trip back to their original proto-dimension.

There are other effects of this extremely tight

linkage. No matter what effects of accuracy or skew (see pages 18 and 41-43) a dimension walker attempts to achieve when entering a quantum proto-dimension, the results are always the same. The dimension walker arrives exactly at the corresponding point in the parent proto-dimension (exceeding the maximum amount of accuracy possible with other types of interdimensional travel). It is theorized that the reason for this is the extreme "proximity" that the quantum proto-dimensions have with their parent dimensions. What this means is that stages of success spent on skew and accuracy are effectively wasted on the quantum proto-dimensions, although they could still be used to hold a portal open for an extended period of time.

The primary use of Dimension Walk stages of success in the quantum proto-dimensions, however, is increasing the degree of modification (stretching or compression of distance or time) found there (see "Entering the Quantum Proto-Dimensions," page 12). A powerful Darkling could enter a quantum proto-dimension where the degree of modification makes trips 1000 times faster than they would be in the dimension they are linked to. The best that most humans can hope for, however, is a modification factor somewhere between 10 and 100.





Perceiving the Quantum Proto-Dimensions

Empathic characters perceive the quantum proto-dimensions in much the same way they do the Earth. There is "ground" for them to walk on and a "sky" overhead, but it all has a vaguely surreal look about it, as if it were a dream image rather than something actually being seen with the eye. Everything native to a quantum proto-dimension appears to be black but, somehow, differentiation of objects is not difficult. For example, small obstacles on the ground, the kind which routinely trips hikers on Earth, are readily apparent to empathic characters even though they should blend flawlessly into their background. This strange effect is a by-product of the fact that the quantum proto-dimensions are not perceived with the earthly senses but are, instead, sensed empathically.

It should be noted that while empathics can tell what locations in the parent dimension correspond to their location in a quantum proto-dimension, it is not possible to conduct a search of the parent dimension from a quantum proto-dimension. For example, if Scirocco was looking for someone in Mechaniaca, he could not retreat into one of Mechaniaca's quantum proto-dimensions and walk around there until he found them. The empathic directionsense that allows navigation in a quantum proto-dimension does not allow an empath to scan the parent proto-dimension.

Non-empathic characters in a quantum proto-

dimension will be unable to see, hear, or even feel the ground beneath their feet. In fact, they will be totally unable to sense anything native to the proto-dimension which they are in. If someone or something comes into contact with them, they will feel it, but will be unable to see who, or what, is touching them, nor will they hear anything that is said.

Non-empaths who are left alone (without an empath) in a quantum proto-dimension are sent into the interstices when that dimension collapses.

It is possible for empathics to use their empathy to protect non-empaths from the effects mentioned above. If an empath establishes an empathic link with Human Empathy, Project Thought, or another similar empathic skill, the non-empath will be able to perceive their surroundings. They will, essentially, be piggy-back riding on the empathic senses of their benefactors. (Assume that empathic contact, once established, lasts the duration of the trip to that quantum proto-dimension.)

Presumably, the inability of non-empaths to perceive the quantum proto-dimensions is related to the fact that the presence of empathic individuals is what causes their existence in the first place.

Entering the Quantum Proto-Dimensions

Quantum proto-dimensions behave as if they had the same discontinuity as their parent dimension. It is an Easy: Dimension Walk task for a human to enter one of Earth's quantum proto-dimensions. Entering a quantum proto-dimension from Mechaniaca, on the other hand, would be an Average: Dimension Walk task for a human. Of course, this assumes that there are no environmental modifiers acting against the dimension walker. The player must state which type of quantum proto-dimension is being entered: time stretch, time compress, distance stretch, or distance compress.

Failure means that the empath is unable to open a portal to any quantum proto-dimension. Catastrophic Failure means two things: First, the portal is opened to the opposite modification than the empath intended: time compress instead of time stretch, for example, or distance stretch instead of distance compress. Second, the empath will not realize that the wrong portal

NON-EMPATHS IN THE PROTO-DIMENSIONS

Non-empaths are unable to use Dimension Walk skill, but once they have been transported to another proto-dimension (by whatever means), they will be fully able to interact with that proto-dimension in most cases, the quantum proto-dimensions being the chief exception. Non-empaths will find interdimensional travel to be somewhat more dangerous than will their empathic counterparts (largely due to the danger that they will be trapped in another proto-dimension), but not tremendously so.

Referees should guard against making adventures that require specific empathic talents, since not every character can be empathic.



has been opened until she or he enters the quantum proto-dimension.

If the task attempt is successful, then the referee should roll to determine the empath's stages of success for the task, and convert them into success factors. Success factors are handled differently for the quantum proto-dimensions. As was mentioned before, skewed and offset movement are not possible between the Earth and the quantum proto-dimensions, and accuracy is no longer a concern. Instead, these elements are replaced with *modification*, a measure of how much the time or distance in the proto-dimensions are changed in comparison to real world time or distance.

Modification is purchased, each stage of success buying 2 factors. However, unlike skew, offset, and accuracy (discussed later), not every factor spent on modification will automatically increase it. This is due to the way the modification levels are quantified.

For example, Robin must deliver an important message to an empathic underground cell 32 kilometers away. No vehicles are available, but she must deliver the message within 30 minutes. She attempts to dimension walk into a distance compress quantum proto-dimension, putting all success factors into modification. Travelling from Earth to

one of Earth's quantum proto-dimensions is an Easy: Dimension Walk task, and Robin succeeds (for a complete discussion of the Dimension Walk task, see pages 35-44). The referee rolls again, and determines that Robin gets 3 stages of success (this is discussed on page 38), which converts into 6 factors for the Modification Table on page 14 (2 factors for each level of success). Six success factors is enough to achieve a modification of 50, but not enough to achieve a modification of 100. Robin successfully enters the quantum proto-dimension where distances are compressed by a factor of 50, meaning that travelling one kilometer there is the same as travelling 50 kilometers on Earth, or travelling 0.64 kilometers is the same as travelling 32 kilometers on Earth.

Since a kilometer is 1000 meters, 0.64 kilometers is 640 meters, which Robin could walk in 80 five-second combat phases (a walk is 8 meters per phase, and $640 \div 8 = 80$), which is 400 seconds, or just under seven minutes ($400 \div 60 = 6.66$), not counting the time needed to open a portal and enter the quantum proto-dimension. By running part of the way, Robin could get there even faster. To walk 32 kilometers normally would take much longer, and Robin would never be able to deliver her message in time.



Encounters in the Quantum Proto-Dimensions

A simple encounter table for the quantum proto-dimensions cannot be created. However, it should not be too difficult for referees to create appropriate encounters if they keep the following in mind:

First, nothing will ever be encountered in a quantum proto-dimension that could not be encountered in the dimension which spawned it. If the Pale never travel to Pyre, then there will be no Pale in one of Pyre's

quantum proto-dimensions. Likewise, non-empathic creatures cannot enter the quantum proto-dimensions alone. If a non-empath (human, Darkling, or beastie) is present, then there must also be an empath present who is stabilizing the proto-dimension's existence.

Darklings who rely on DarkTek to travel from one proto-dimension to another will not be encountered in the quantum proto-dimensions. This is because the various DarkTek methods of interdimensional travel will not function very well in the quantum proto-dimensions. A dimensional anchor left in an unpopulated quantum proto-dimension will fall into the interstices when the dimension collapses. This rules out the construction of a gateway in a quantum proto-dimension.

A dimension walking device could pop its users into the quantum proto-dimension of their choice but, unless one of them was already capable of dimension

walking, they would have no way of getting back. If none of them had empathic talent, the quantum proto-dimension would immediately collapse around them. A second dimension walking device left in the quantum proto-dimension would end up in the interstices the moment that there was no empath in the quantum proto-dimension.

The final thing that referees should keep in mind is that the higher the modification level of the quantum proto-dimension, the more powerful the Darklings who use it are likely to be. Also, the higher the distance compression, the smaller the proto-dimension will be, and so the higher the likelihood of encountering any entity which happens to be there.

Modification Table

Factors	Effect
0	Time or distance is not modified
1	Time or distance is modified by a factor of 5
2	Time or distance is modified by a factor of 10
3	Time or distance is modified by a factor of 25
5	Time or distance is modified by a factor of 50
8	Time or distance is modified by a factor of 100
13	Time or distance is modified by a factor of 250
21	Time or distance is modified by a factor of 500

THE PROPERTIES OF PROTO-DIMENSIONS

Humanity has, for all its existence, lived on the Earth. Consequently, humans have trouble imagining things being very different. A few trips into the proto-dimensions will correct this deficiency. In the proto-dimensions, many of the things humanity assumes to be absolute are not.



Size and Shape

All proto-dimensions are not created equal. They come in all shapes and sizes. Some seem almost as large as the universe, with planets, stars, and even galaxies. Others are not quite big enough to serve as a decent-sized broom closet. Earth's parallel in some proto-dimensions is a spherical planet. In other dimensions, it is a very limited piece of terrain.

Boundaries

There are many ways in which the proto-dimensions are bounded. The important ones are discussed below.

Curvature: Many proto-dimensions curve back on themselves. For humans, who are natives to a spherical planet, this is easy enough to comprehend, but not as easy to deal with. This curvature is not part of the terrain, but part of the spatial fabric instead.

For example, imagine a group of characters who enter a proto-dimension, walk for four or five kilometers in what, to them, seems to be a perfectly straight line and find themselves back at the very point where they began. It is intuitively obvious that they have been walking on a sphere which is about five kilometers in circumference, but the terrain seems to be perfectly flat. To an astronaut standing on the surface of a planetoid, only five kilometers such curvature would be readily visible. The difference between the two cases is that in proto-dimensions it is not the ground that is curved, but the space-time continuum itself. Sometimes the curvature is even more pronounced. In a proto-dimension that is only a kilometer or two in circumference, characters might be able to see themselves off in the distance (weather permitting).

In addition, there is no reason to assume that the fabric of proto-dimensions will always be spherically curved. It could just as easily be as twisted as a corkscrew or as formless as a crumpled paper bag. Proto-dimensions are often in the form of cylinders, cones, toroids, and other complex geometric shapes. In a proto-dimension shaped like a toroid (a doughnut), characters could walk a kilometer due east, and, in doing so, circumnavigate the dimension, but walking due north, they could walk many times that distance and never get anywhere near their starting point. Through all of this, of course, the terrain seems perfectly flat, just as the surface of the Earth seems perfectly flat.

Navigation skill is almost useless in proto-dimensions which are acutely or unevenly curved. The thought processes and intuitions which make up the Navigation skill are based on premises which are not valid in these proto-dimensions. Any Navigation task will be from one to four levels more difficult than normal, depending on the acuteness and variability of the dimension's curvature. The referee may decide to reduce this additional difficulty for characters who have spent some time in the proto-dimension in which they are travelling.

For example, the referee decides that Houston must succeed at a Formidable: Navigation task to return directly to where she planned on meeting her teammates (normally an Easy: Navigation task on Earth). Since Houston has an Intelligence of 7 and a Navigation of 4, her player will need to roll a 5 or less $[(7+4) \times 1/2 = 5]$ on a D20 to succeed. Her player rolls a 7, which is a failure, and so the referee decides that Houston spends as much time getting back to the rendezvous site as she would have if she had retraced her steps—so much for the direct route. If Houston had spent more time exploring the proto-dimension and had a better feel for its curvature, then the referee would probably have decided that the task would only be Difficult or even Average, in which case the roll of 7 would allow Houston to have succeeded in her attempt.

Obviously, navigation devices are of no help with these tasks. The Compunav's (DarkTek, page 29)

COMBAT IN THE PROTO-DIMENSIONS

Most proto-dimensions where humans can exist for any length of time have physics and conditions which require no modifications to the combat rules. Where changes are necessary, they are discussed in the chapters dealing with the individual proto-dimensions. Referees creating their own proto-dimensions will need to consider how any changes in physical laws will change the way combat works in their proto-dimension.

Empathic talents work the same in all proto-dimensions, and are not modified for the purpose of combat by any change in proto-dimensional physics.

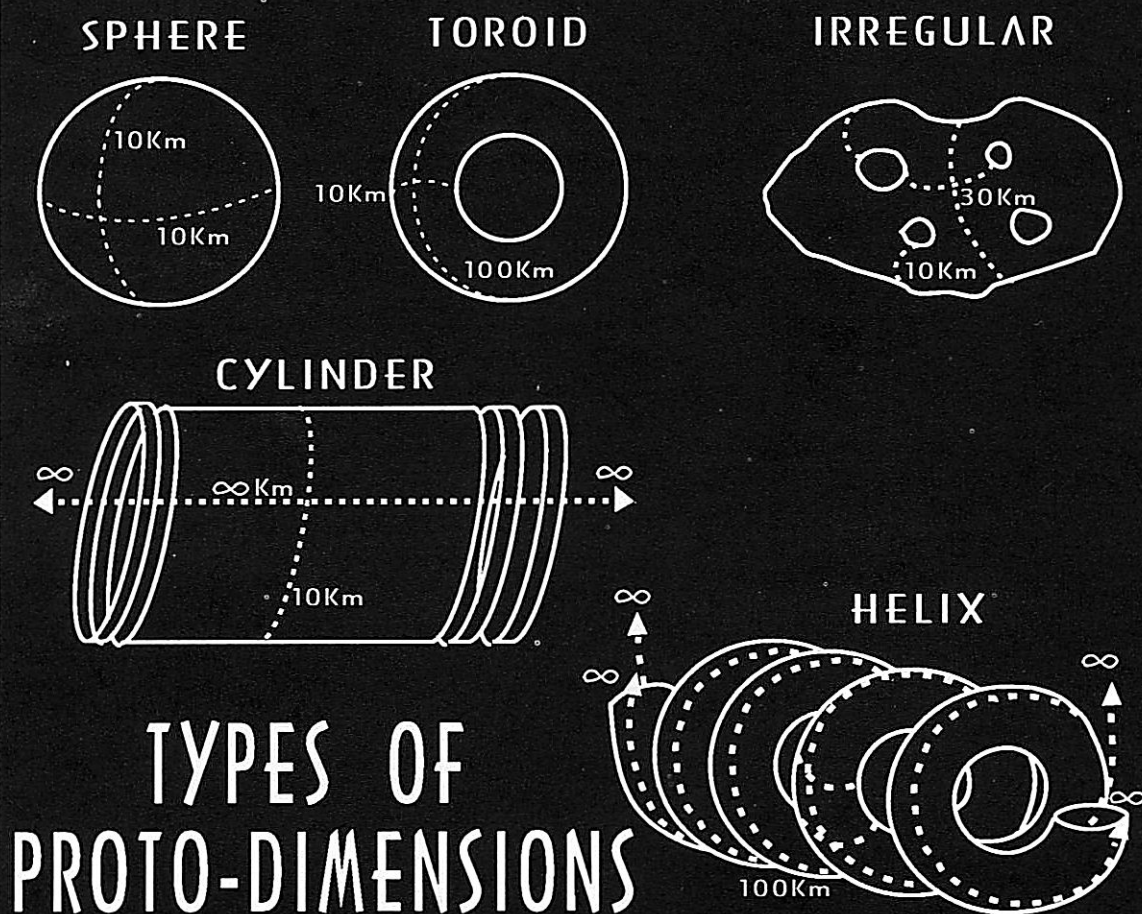


inertial location system is designed and programmed to function on Earth. In a proto-dimension where walking a kilometer east and then a kilometer north does not produce the same results as walking a kilometer north and then a kilometer east, the device will only succeed at getting its user hopelessly lost.

Characters can attempt to modify these devices to function somewhere other than Earth. The task would require careful mapping of the proto-dimension in question (something which is not always very easy), plus the modification of the device which would require success at both a Difficult: Computer Operation task and an Average: Electronics task. If the conver-

sion is successful, the device would function in exactly the same manner as it would on Earth but, needless to say, the satellite cross-check features would be useless (the Earth satellites not being available anywhere else). A Compunav can only be modified for one proto-dimension at a time. Separate map chips must be burned for each proto-dimension the device is to function in. It is up to the referee to decide when a character or group has mapped a given proto-dimension well enough for this task.

Other effects besides curvature bound the proto-dimensions, but for the most part they do not pose as great a threat to navigation. These other boundary effects are described below.





Dimensional Barriers: Many proto-dimensions are literally walled off. Great and impenetrable walls reach up into the sky, demarking the edge of these tiny universes and leaving no question about their size or shape.

Some of these walls are perfectly black, absorbing all light and energy with no effect. They feel clammy to the touch, slick and cold even moments after being assaulted with a laser or a welding torch. It is always darker near these black battlements. In some proto-dimensions, clothed as they are in eternal gloom, it is as black as night at the bases of these gloomy ramparts.

Other times the border walls are reflective. Looking at these walls is like gazing into a perfect mirror. They feel warm to the touch, reflecting every calorie of body heat from the person touching them. Shooting at a target's reflection in one of these walls with a laser weapon would be just as effective as aiming and firing the laser directly at the target. Such a ricochet attack with conventional weapons is not possible because of the deformation of the projectiles upon impact with the barrier. Were it not for this effect, bullets would bounce off of these walls with the same mathematical precision as laser beams.

There are infinite possibilities between these two extremes. There are walls that appear to be made of a grey, rubbery plastic which will yield a centimeter or two if pushed, but are impervious to damage. Others appear to be made of stone and can be chipped at but never penetrated. Still others have the quasi-organic look of DarkTek and will ooze bilious fluids from any cut or hole made in them.

Relativistic Barriers: One of the strangest types of proto-dimensional barrier isn't a physical barrier at all. It is, instead, a relativistic barrier like the one which prevents objects in this universe from reaching the speed of light. When PCs encounter a relativistic barrier, they will begin to notice that each step is a little more difficult than the last, as if they are going up an ever steepening hill, although they will not notice any difference in the terrain. After a few steps, they will notice that characters in front of them seem to be moving slower, and characters behind them moving faster. If one of the characters were to fire a gun in the direction of travel, the bullet would appear to lazily depart from the weapon, slowly fly a short distance, and fall to the ground. A bullet fired

at right angles to the direction of travel would appear to behave normally to the firer, but would seem to be travelling very slowly to an observer behind the firer, and much faster than normal to an observer in front of the firer.

What is happening here is that each movement requires progressively more energy the closer the character's approach to the edge of the proto-dimension. Eventually, further movement toward the edge of the proto-dimension will require an almost infinite amount of energy, bringing movement to a halt. For reasons unknown, light can penetrate farther into the border area, so characters will be able to see farther than they can walk. Sky and land will seem to blend together into a mist or fog bank.

The danger of a relativistic barrier is that it cannot be detected until the characters actually begin to experience its effects, and, by that time, something might find them in their impeded state and be able to outmaneuver them by simply remaining "downhill."

Relativistic barriers become noticeable after moving about eight meters into them. Nothing can move more than about 16 meters into a relativistic barrier area before being halted by the relativistic effects. For each meter "uphill" a character is, movement is halved (actually, movement takes twice as much energy, but the final result is the same).

Relativistic barriers might be expected to have some unusual effects on combat, but this type of barrier is a very small proportion of the few proto-dimensions that have it, and combat situations are not going to come up often enough to make a full discussion worth the space. Empathic skills and melee combat proceed normally. Hitting a target when firing "uphill" becomes one level easier, firing "downhill" one level more difficult.

Gateways: In some rare cases, one proto-dimension may be partly or completely bordered by a colossal gateway into another. This is an unusual, and imperfectly understood, variation of the gateway in that it seems to be permanent and to require no anchors (see pages 46-48 for a discussion of gateways). Whether these dimension separating gateways were created by the Dark Lords or are a natural product of the formation of the proto-dimensions is unknown. Certainly, no human is capable of closing such border gateways.



Discontinuity

The weirder and less Earth-like a proto-dimension is, the harder it will be for a human dimension walker to move into it (see the discussion of Dimension Walk, later in this book) and the more difficult it will be for humans to function there. The measure of this "weirdness" is referred to as the proto-dimension's *discontinuity factor* (discontinuity for short).

A discontinuity factor has little to do with what a proto-dimension is physically like. Mechanica and the Plaguelands both have a discontinuity of 1 but no one would ever mistake one for the other. It is, rather, an index of several factors, among other things the "nearness" of a proto-dimension to Earth, the natural antipathy the human psyche will have for the proto-dimension, and the extent of the Darkling presence there.



Dimensions which are similar to some Earth-like environment, follow the same physical laws that govern the Earth, and have not suffered a major invasion by the Dark Ones tend to have a discontinuity of 1. As these factors increase so does the discontinuity.

The proto-dimensions which the Dark Masters call home, or at least would call home if such a pleasant concept as "home" existed in their malevolent psyches, have discontinuity factors well in excess of 10. When one realizes that the most powerful human dimension walkers have a very difficult time entering a proto-dimension with a discontinuity factor much higher than 5 or 6, one realizes how very alien the Dark Masters must be. Some empaths theorize that this is what protects the Earth from a direct invasion by the Dark Ones themselves.

Discontinuity factors are not immutable. If a pleasant and Earth-like proto-dimension suffered a massive invasion by the Dark Minions, its discontinuity might be increased. If the influence of the Dark Ones was driven out of a proto-dimension, its discontinuity would be lessened. This should alarm those minion hunters who have had dealings with Demonground which, at least in terms of dimension walking, behaves as if it had a discontinuity of 1. If discontinuity is what is keeping the Dark Masters away from the Earth, then this drift must be stopped. If not, the Earth will be devoured like a ripe fruit.

To maintain the element of mystery, referees should never tell players the discontinuity of a proto-dimension. A discontinuity can be roughly deduced from the relative ease or difficulty of entering it, of course, but the referee should keep exact numbers (and any relevant die rolls) secret, announcing only the results.

Correspondence and Skewed Travel

Imagine an office building 50 stories tall, every floor a huge square one block on a side. If you were standing in front of the guard's station on the ground level and were moved straight up for 10 floors, you would come out by the water fountain in the legal department's stenographic pool. With this information we can say that the water fountain is directly above the guard's station. If you walked 10 meters toward the center of the building and then were



teleported straight back down to the ground floor, you would come out 10 meters from the guard's station.

This is an example of correspondence. Every point on the 10th floor corresponds to a single point on the ground floor which is directly below it. The proto-dimensions are like the floors of an office building, only instead of being stacked above the Earth in the Z axis, they are "stacked" along what is sometimes called the Γ (gamma) axis. Just as Z is at right angles to X and Y, Γ (gamma) is at right angles to X, Y, and Z. It is a concept that is difficult to describe in normal words (although it can be done mathematically).

So, when a party who leaves the Earth from the Akiga-Star chemical plant in Tampete, it travels on the Γ (gamma) axis and arrive in Toxia, near a grove of gnarled trees. Later, the same group travels to Toxia from the Carolina Triangle and comes out near a swamp. The group decides to head south and, after a while, comes to a familiar grove of gnarled trees. Returning to Earth the group comes out, of course, on the front steps of the Akiga-Star Citadel in Tampete.

This is an illustration of what is called right angle interdimensional travel. But, as usual, things are never quite as simple as they first appear. Returning to the office building analogy, let's ask the question "What would happen if you didn't quite travel straight up from the guard's station?" Well, logically we can say that you would end up some distance away from the water fountain. Inaccuracies like this occur with dimension walking too. Dimension walkers who are not careful enough could come out as far as 10 kilometers away from the point directly "above" their starting point.

Conversely, individuals might try to deliberately move through the proto-dimensions on an axis which deviates from a right angle on the Γ (gamma) axis. This would allow them to come out somewhere other than the point at which they would have arrived. This is called *skewed* travel by most dimension walkers.

Of course, referees should never tell players exactly where they arrive. The referee should not announce "You skewed a little, and have arrived 11.2 kilometers NNW of the chalk cliffs that correspond to Chiwaukee," merely: "You have arrived...there are some chalk cliffs off in a southerly direction." If the characters are familiar with the proto-dimension, more information can be provided.

Physics and Assimilation

Physical laws may differ from proto-dimension to proto-dimension. The wind blows because air travels from regions of high pressure to regions of low pressure. These high pressure areas are formed when the air is heated, which occurs because the sun shines on the Earth, which is possible because hydrogen can be fused into helium, and so on. Take away any link in this chain, and there will be no wind. Of course there will be other changes too. If, for example, air didn't travel from high-pressure regions to low-pressure regions, guns wouldn't work—there would be no force to push the bullets out of the barrel. Steam engines, cars, and (of immediate significance to arriving PCs) lungs would also be useless.

When the PCs first enter a proto-dimension, they may not notice the difference between it and the Earth. Part of the reason for this is that the objects in the proto-dimension are adapted to the conditions there. For example, let us consider a group of PCs visiting Slide (see page 126 for details). A creature from Slide, a proto-dimension where the force of friction is weaker than on Earth, will have developed other methods of locomotion. Even though everything is as slick as oiled glass, it will move around without apparent difficulty. When the PCs try to take their first step, however, they will discover what is unusual about Slide: rubber-soled shoes on sand act like ice skates on a frozen lake.

Assimilation: Physical laws are a property of the dimension, not of the objects there. Assimilation is the process by which objects and beings from one proto-dimension gradually adjust themselves to behave according to the physical laws of another proto-dimension. What this means is that the PCs and their gear will tend to retain the influence of Earthly physics for a time, but if they stay in a proto-dimension for long enough they will become assimilated with that proto-dimension's physics. It will probably not be a pleasant experience—or, in many cases, a survivable one.

Let us return to our party visiting Slide. After several falls, some minor injuries, and the loss of a piece of equipment or two, the group of PCs decide to leave Slide and return to Earth to better equip themselves for the conditions they have found there. They return a few hours later equipped with golf shoes—now they can at least walk around without having to make an Agility roll for every step they take.



After an hour or so, they see some dark elves gathering mud from a creek bed (the dark elves plan to use the mud's low-friction properties for some act of mayhem). One of the PCs draws her pistol and is startled when it slips through her fingers. She bends down to get it and her foot slides out of her shoe. A companion grabs onto her jacket to keep her from falling, but it slides from his grasp and both PCs find themselves on the ground. The dark elves, alerted by the commotion, use their Dimension Walk skills to slip away (pun not intended). The PCs have learned a lesson about interdimensional physics they will not soon forget. Their equipment has become assimilated with Slide's low-friction physics.

If they stayed in Slide long enough, eventually their bodies would become assimilated. Blood cells would begin to slip through pores in their veins causing bruises. Shoulders and hips would slide out of joint with ease. Eventually the delicate systems which allow their bodies to function would fail and they would die. These are the dangers of assimilation to a universe that is too different.

The Effects of Assimilation: The effects of assimilation on simple inanimate objects must usually be determined by the referee using logic and common sense. Usually the more complex an item, the more likely it is to malfunction as assimilation proceeds. For example, a fully assimilated knife will continue to work in all but the most radically different proto-dimensions. Firearms, on the other hand, are a little more complex, and have more systems that can be disrupted by a minor change in physical laws. Something as complicated as an automobile, in which dozens of systems must function in unity, will almost never work perfectly after being assimilated. The human body is, of course, much more complicated than any motor vehicle.

Each proto-dimension will have an assimilation effect value given with its description (sometimes this will be 0). This number represents the damage a character will suffer as a result of assimilation. Once assimilation reaches the halfway point (30 minutes after assimilation begins), characters will begin to suffer damage. This effect will continue, and additional damage will be applied every 15 minutes after this. Before assimilation is complete (30 minutes after it begins and then, again, 15 minutes later), the damage done will be half the

assimilation effect value, but once a character is completely assimilated, the full value should be used. The damage is applied to the chest in the same manner as poison damage. Other special effects of assimilation will be described in the individual proto-dimension discussions.

After assimilation damage begins, it is a constant, progressive effect. If a PC leaves a proto-dimension sometime between damage allocations, the referee should determine the amount of time that has passed and, from that, the amount of damage which the character has suffered since damage was last taken. Fractions should be rounded up, of course.

Naturally, anyone who is suffering assimilation damage will want to return to Earth, or a proto-dimension with Earth-like physics at the very least. This is a good idea, but just because the PCs have escaped a hostile proto-dimension does not mean they are out of danger. Even though they've moved into a less hostile dimension, individuals who are suffering assimilation damage are still attuned with the proto-dimension they've left.

If the PCs were fully assimilated, it will take them an hour to fully revert to normal. During that time, two more applications of half assimilation damage are applied to the PCs, at 15 and 30 minutes after their return. After that, they will have recovered enough that they will not suffer any more damage. Characters who were not fully attuned will only suffer half assimilation damage once more.

Note that the fact that characters carry Earthly physics around with them for a short time does not permit them to carry a little packet of Earth conditions around with them. If a proto-dimension contains no breathable atmosphere, is too hot, or is otherwise inimical to human life, characters venturing there must use other means to stay alive (scuba tanks, protective suits, sorcerous powers) or they will perish.

Resisting Assimilation: Resisting assimilation by a proto-dimension is a function of Empathy. For this reason, the first things to become assimilated with a proto-dimension's physics will be the inanimate objects which the PCs bring with them. Later, non-empathic PCs and ultimately the empathic PCs will be assimilated.

Inanimate Objects: It takes about an hour for equipment, weapons, and vehicles to become assimilated



by a proto-dimension. The effect starts slowly, but will accelerate as time passes. Before 30 minutes has passed, there is almost no change in the operation of most equipment. After another 15 minutes, the change will be fairly easy to detect and the item may begin to malfunction. After the full hour, the item will be completely attuned with the new physics of the proto-dimension.

The only exception to this involves those non-living objects which are included in an individual's concept of self. Contact lenses, pacemakers, and even the ET machinery built into cyborg escapees and rogue androids will continue to behave normally, at least until the individual they are bound to loses attunement with Earthly physics. For most individuals, this includes commonly worn jewelry and clothing, but rarely weapons or tools. A cyborg escapee who is using a cyber hand, especially one which does not closely resemble a human hand, might have trouble with it long before noticing any other peculiar effects.

If a PC has a special piece of equipment, one which he or she almost always carries, a success at a Difficult: Willpower roll will allow that individual to maintain a link with it. This only works with a particular piece of equipment. If a PC *always* carries one particular Colt Krait, then the referee should allow a Willpower check to be made. If that person always carries a pistol and this time it just happens to be a Colt Krait, then the proper empathic link will not be established.

It should be noted that life forms which are not resisting assimilation (such as unconscious humans) will adjust at the same rate as inanimate objects. In an hour, they will find themselves completely assimilated by the physical laws of the dimension which they are in. In most cases, characters will not want to do this since it usually means pain and, ultimately, death, but there are exceptions. One such exception is when the characters have returned to Earth after being assimilated by another dimension.



Non-Empaths Who Are Resisting Assimilation: Given the effects that most proto-dimensional physics shifts are likely to have on the PCs' bodies, it is much more likely that they would want to avoid assimilation rather than embrace it. The life force of any creature, even one with no measurable empathy, will allow it to resist assimilation. This resistance is the product of some slight empathic strength which is fundamental in the makeup of all life. For a non-empath to resist assimilation is an Easy: Willpower task which should be rolled when the characters enter the proto-dimension. Characters who fail will be assimilated at the same rate as inanimate objects. Characters who succeed will not begin to be assimilated for an hour. Characters who manage an Outstanding Success will not begin to be assimilated for two hours. After the resistance time has passed, assimilation will begin, and one hour later the characters will be fully assimilated.



ALTERNATE ASSIMILATION

For referees who wish to run a slightly more unusual campaign, assimilation can be allowed to take a different form. At the referee's choice, an object or being becomes something different upon assimilation. This transmutation should be into something analogous in the new proto-dimension—weapons should change into weapons, equipment into something with a similar function, clothing to clothing.

For example, Scirocco, Houston, and Fuller arrive in Gothic, and remain long enough for assimilation to begin on their clothing and equipment. Scirocco is clothed in army surplus BDUs with web gear and enough equipment to count as military gear. Fuller and Houston are clothed in primarily civilian clothing, but both are armed. Scirocco will find that his camouflage clothing will change into a suit of plate armor from the late medieval era that Gothic reflects. His web gear will change into a baldric and scabbard for the short sword his XM-22 pistol changes into, and he will find a halberd in his hands where his M16A2 once was. Fuller will himself be dressed in the doublet, hose, and light boots of a late medieval courtier, his Remington 870 pump shotgun changed into a hunting crossbow, and the bandoleer of 12-gauge shells changed into a quiver of crossbow bolts. Houston finds herself dressed as a late medieval noblewoman, carrying a crossbow that used to be her XM-26, and with a gold-chased and filigreed stiletto hanging from her waist where her commando knife used to be.

Scirocco, Houston, and Fuller are fortunate that they ended up in a proto-dimension where humans stay human. Had they arrived in a proto-dimension where the dominant form of intelligent life is a two-meter tall, upright blue arthropod resembling a lobster, their assimilation might have been even more of a shock to them (not to mention to their companions when they return to Earth).

A further point for consideration: Different types of creatures assimilate into different things. A referee might use this to good effect if a group containing a dark elf saboteur travels to the Blue Lobster proto-dimension—in that proto-dimension, humans assimilate into upright blue lobsters, but dark elves assimilate into grey-green iguana-like creatures. The dark elf saboteur would appear as an iguana wearing a lobster mask (dark elf disguised as human = iguana disguised as lobster).

Although it requires more work on the part of the referee, this form of assimilation can prove very challenging for the players and very entertaining for everyone concerned.

Empaths Who Are Resisting Assimilation: Empathic PCs can resist assimilation by a proto-dimension for much longer than those who are not so empowered. One hour after empathic characters first enter a proto-dimension, they must pass an Easy: Empathy task in order to resist assimilation. After another hour, an Average: Empathy task and so on. An Outstanding Success means that the empath automatically passes the next hour's roll, but the roll after that will still be two levels more difficult. When one of these Empathy tasks ends in failure, the empath will begin to be assimilated in the same manner as non-empaths.

For example, Roman has travelled to Slide to destroy a gateway with a combination of his Empathy skills and plastic explosives (for a discussion of gateways and how to destroy them, see pages 46-48). He rolls a 20, an automatic failure, for the Easy: Empathy task an hour after he enters the proto-dimension. Roman's player knows nothing of this until the damage starts to be felt, however.

Half an hour later, Roman takes 10 points of damage due to assimilation (half of Slide's 20 points of assimilation damage). Roman's player curses his luck, but decides to take a chance and press on. Fifteen minutes later, he takes another 10 points of damage but, by then, he has managed to locate the gateway. After 10 minutes, he destroys the gateway and returns home. Since Roman was present for two-thirds of the 15 minutes ($10/15 = 2/3$), the referee decides to inflict two-thirds of the 20 damage points, or 14 ($0.66 \times 20 = 13.33$, rounded up). When Roman returns to Earth, he takes yet another 10 points of damage before he re-attunes himself with the Earth. After that time, he is out of danger. This adds up to a total of 44 points of damage ($10 + 10 + 14 + 10 = 44$) to Roman's chest location, which (for Roman) is a serious wound.

Had Roman stayed another hour, he would have suffered a total of 114 points of damage: 10 points twice before assimilation was complete, 20 points when assimilation was complete and twice afterward, 14 points when he left the dimension and 10 points twice while he reattuned with the Earth ($10 + 10 + 20 + 20 + 20 + 14 + 10 + 10 = 114$). Of course, Roman would not survive this much damage, and he would probably have decided to abandon his mission before his situation became so dire.

INTERSTICES: THE INTERDIMENSIONAL SPACES





The *interstices* are the foundation of the meta-universe. They are the sea of disorder in which the birth of the universe occurred. Whether the universe continues to expand until it is infinitely dispersed or collapses back into a singularity like the one which gave rise to the Big Bang, the interstices will remain. The interstices permeate each of the proto-dimensions. They are not a proto-dimension in themselves, although characters can travel to them (sometimes voluntarily, sometimes not).

The interstices permeate all that exists, the myriad proto-dimensions as well as the universe of Earth. From the interstices, locations on the Earth as well as in the various proto-dimensions can be seen under the right conditions. These locations appear as shadowy, translucent forms much as they do to mystics who are projecting their minds into the astral proto-dimension. This is not at all surprising, as the interstices correspond exactly to the astral proto-dimension. The difference between them is the way in which they are experienced. Mystics only send their minds into the astral proto-dimension, whereas travellers in the interstices are not disconnected from their bodies. This can be likened to a person in an airplane flying over the ocean and a person sitting in a rowboat in the middle of the ocean. A passenger in the airplane will be able to journey widely and see much. A passenger in the rowboat will see little, and will feel waves and get wet—especially if the sea is choppy. The interstices are a rough sea at best.

Entering the Interstices

Most dimension walkers do not willingly enter the interstices, although it would be an Easy: Dimension Walk task to do so from the Earth or any of the proto-dimensions. The only time most dimension walkers find themselves in the interstices is when they have suffered a Catastrophic Failure while attempting Dimension Walk, or when they have been placed there, either by a powerful enemy or DarkTek.

The reason that dimension walkers avoid the interstices is twofold. First, it is very difficult to escape from the interstices, much more difficult than common Dimension Walk tasks. It is more difficult to perform any empathic task which is a cascade of Dimension Walk while there. Any cascade skill of Dimension Walk is automatically two levels more difficult while in the

interstices (Easy tasks become Difficult and Difficult tasks become Impossible). It is some small condolence that avoiding detection by the Dark Ones when using such tasks is two levels easier in the interstices. Either some force shields the interstices from the Dark One's view or else the Dark Ones simply don't bother to look, figuring that anyone who is trapped in the interstices is doomed and not worth bothering with.

The other reason that dimension walkers avoid the interstices is that the environment will eventually drive those trapped there to madness. Humans and Dark Minions are equally subject to this madness—perhaps even the Dark Lords are not immune.

Conditions in the Interstices

Characters in the interstices will experience a sensation of disembodiment. It is not that their minds have left their bodies or that they are physically numbed by the dimension—there is simply nothing (or very nearly nothing) there to sense. The eye sees a hazy grayness, the ear hears a purer silence than most humans have ever encountered before, the air is odorless and tasteless and the sense of touch is assaulted with a barrage of pure nothingness.

Movement: Movement in the interstices is very much like flight. Characters can move a distance equal to the sum of their Intelligence and Empathy attributes every combat phase (this counts as an action). There is no acceleration or inertia in the interstices, and characters may move along any path desired, making right angle turns at full speed without ill-effect. Even though there seems to be breathable air, characters will experience no "rush" of air as they move. Also, as there are no landmarks in the interstices—characters have no sense of movement unless there are others present.

Hearing and Visibility: Characters can see their own bodies, hear their own voice, and touch themselves. If the characters are not alone, they will be able to see the forms of their fellows and any beings they encounter (within 800 meters), hear their teammate's voices (within 160 meters), and even touch one another (assuming they are close enough to do so).

These sensory impressions are every bit as vivid as they would be on Earth, perhaps even more so when contrasted to the nothingness of the interstices, but they are by no means equal to the volume of stimulus



that a human mind is used to. This absence of sensory input will eventually cause the PCs some problems, as are described below.

The Madness of Nothingness

After spending a few hours in the interstices, characters will begin to notice a few strange things. While time seems to pass, characters never seem to get hungry or tired. Likewise, the sensation of pain does not exist in the interstices. Even death does not exist in the interstices. It would seem that an individual could spend all of eternity there with no ill effects. This is, of course, wrong.

After spending 24 hours in the interstices, characters must pass an Average: Willpower test or they will begin to hallucinate. If they succeed at the first Willpower test then they must make a Difficult: Willpower test after another 24 hours. If they succeed at this second attempt, they must pass a Formidable: Willpower test after another 24 hours, and so on. Once a character fails a Willpower roll, hallucinations will begin. These early hallucinations will be relatively benign. Large, brightly colored shapes will seem to drift by, dividing and merging. Shadowy figures will be seen in the distance. Buzzes, hums, and the sound of far off song will be heard.

Along with these hallucinations, another series of Willpower checks will begin. As before, the tests will start at the Average level and get worse from there. When one of the Willpower checks in this second series ends in failure, the character's hallucinations will begin to grow more and more horrific. Those brightly colored shapes will develop unpleasant details like tentacles, claws, and eye stalks and will no longer be content to merely drift by but will charge the character with their horrific maws wide open, exposing an infinitely deep pit lined with row after row of razor-sharp teeth (or whatever other horrific images the referee wishes to describe).

At this time, the third and final series of Willpower checks will begin. When a character finally fails a test in this third series, he or she will suffer a mental breakdown, the nature of which can be chosen from the Mental Breakdown table.

Companionship makes the emptiness of the interstices easier to take. Each of these checks becomes one level easier if the character is accompanied by one

or more non-hostile PCs or NPCs (they need not be close friends, just willing to talk once in a while). A mystic using astral travel and communicating by empathic means counts for this purpose.

Mental Breakdown

1D10 Roll	Result
1-5	Amnesia
6-7	Hallucination
8-9	Psychosis
10	Catatonia

Amnesia: The character will forget the events leading up to his or her presence in the interstices as well as any experiences there. Characters who enter the interstices as a result of a Catastrophic Failure at a Dimension Walk task will lose the ability to dimension walk until they recover. Characters with a high degree of familiarity with the proto-dimensions will suffer the greatest memory loss.

Treating amnesia is trickier than normal psychiatric counseling. Usually, each amnesiac has to recover on





his or her own. Recovering from amnesia is an exception to the usual psychological counseling rule (see below), each time the amnesiac undergoes psychological counseling for a period of a week (at least 14 hours during that week), or is confronted with a great psychological stress or trauma, the amnesiac makes an Impossible: Willpower test for recovery. Some empathic abilities can help victims of amnesia (see *Empathic Sourcebook*, page 46).

Hallucinations: Ordinarily, the interstitial hallucinations will cease when the character is rescued. If this result is achieved, however, the character will continue to suffer from random hallucinations of a horrifying nature. If the character does not receive some sort of treatment, the hallucinations will, over time, grow worse and the victim will be unable to resist attacking whatever imaginary creatures torment him or her. This can make the victim of the hallucinations very dangerous.

Psychosis: Some portions of the character's mental makeup are so damaged by the ordeal that the character loses touch with reality. Often this will cause the character to suffer violent mood swings and to become very hostile, even violent, for no apparent reason. Unpredictability is the key word here. This requires twice as much psychiatric attention (two

hours per week instead of one) as normal.

Catatonia: Characters who have been rendered catatonic by the interstices are those who have attempted to draw on some sort of inner strength by retreating within themselves. While this is not a bad strategy in the interstices, the characters tend to lose touch with the outside world and completely freeze up. They are trapped within their own minds. Catatonia cannot be cured with normal psychology. Only the individuals can escape the battlements they have erected within their minds. Certain mystic disciplines can assist in breaking these barriers (see *Empathic Sourcebook*, page 103).

Psychological Counseling: Each one of these mental breakdowns is usually capable of being solved with psychiatric assistance, after the character is rescued from the interstices. Unless otherwise noted, a character or NPC with Psychology skill can counsel the mentally disturbed character on resolving the problem. At least one hour a week has to be spent doing this to make any progress. After each four hours of counseling, the character may test to see if he or she can shake the problem. This is a Formidable test against the character's Willpower plus the counselor's Psychology skill level (failure means no progress, Catastrophic Failure has no further effect). Some mental problems have alternate methods of solution. These are listed with specific problems, as appropriate.

While they will not suffer additional mental breakdowns after the first one, the effects of that mental breakdown will increase with the amount of time spent in the interstices. A character who spent a year in the interstices and suffered amnesia, for example, might forget everything that she had ever known beyond the most instinctual things.

Getting Out

The increasing chance for hallucination and madness makes it desirable for characters in the interstices to get out as quickly as possible. This is, however, much more difficult than normal interdimensional travel.

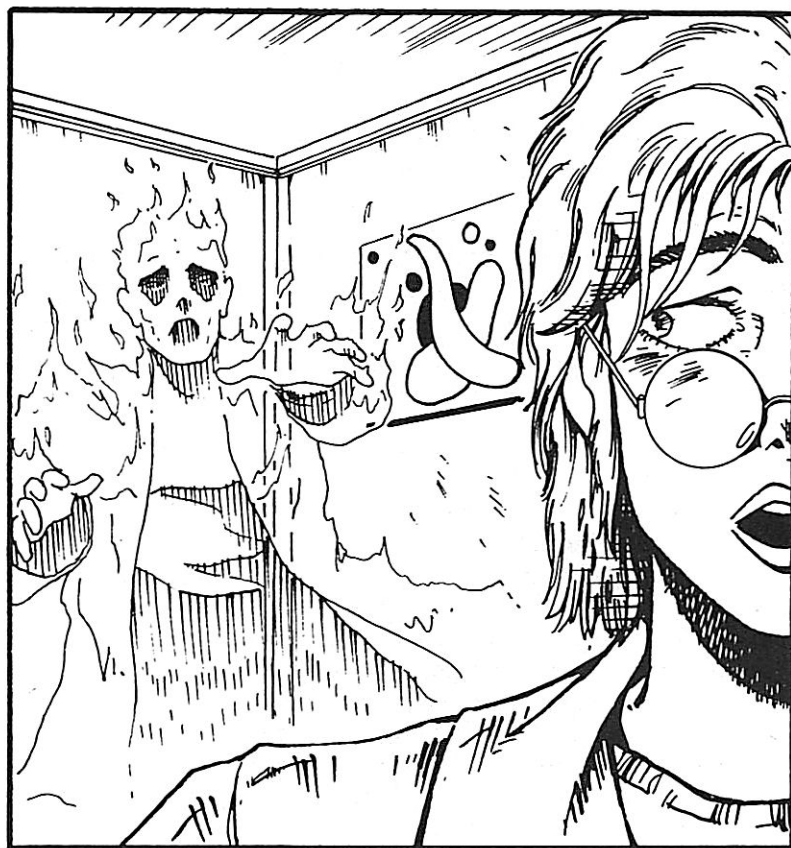
Characters trapped in the interstices will first need to locate a dimension which they can escape to. This is a Difficult: Dimension Walk task and can only be attempted once per day. Characters will have little control over what dimension they find. It could be a

Mystics and the Interstices

Mystics who find themselves physically in the interstices (in other words, mystics not using astral travel—consult pages 87-88 and 104-109 of the *Empathic Sourcebook* for details on astral travel) suffer the same consequences as anyone else. Mystics may use all of their normal empathic skills from the interstices, but are subject to the same limitations as everyone else. Mystics should bear in mind that once trapped, they may leave their bodies and travel astrally if they wish, but their body is still in the interstices, and while their bodies will not suffer mental damage they are very vulnerable to physical damage (the "silver cord" will make locating them a very easy task for potential foes).

Mystics using astral travel cannot physically interact (touch, hear, or speak) with anything in the interstices, although they can see and be seen. They may use Empathy, however. Astral travellers cannot be damaged by melee or fire combat.





Empathy: Characters with Empathy skills can attempt to use them from the interstices, but each task becomes one level more difficult, and characters will be under normal stress at a minimum. For example, sending a "Help, I'm trapped in the interstices! Open a portal!" message via Project Thought, would normally be a Difficult: Project Thought task but would become a Formidable task.

Rescue: If the trapped character can convince someone on Earth that they are indeed seeing a ghost, there is a chance of them calling in a paranormal investigator (roll 1D10 for 6 or less). There is a chance that this individual will quickly realize what is really going on (roll 1D10 for 5 or less). To be rescued, it is merely necessary to open a portal to the interstices in the near vicinity of the trapped character—they will then be able to step out under their own power.

Leaving a character trapped in the interstices is a nasty thing for a referee to do. If a character cannot leave the interstices any other way, the referee may choose for the character to "wash up" in some proto-dimension or another.

Once characters do manage to get out of the interstices, they will immediately suffer the effects of any damage they have suffered. Characters who have suffered one or more critical wounds should be treated as if they had just suffered those wounds the instant that they exited the interstices. Of course, critical wounds to the head are immediately fatal upon leaving.

Using the Interstices

The interstices do not have a great deal of adventure potential. Even the dimension walker whose skill is advanced enough to allow relatively easy escape from the interstices would not be eager to visit them with their danger of madness, but just because the interstices are not a vacation spot, that does not mean that they are without a certain amount of utility.

Injured characters who are placed in the interstices will not die, or even suffer from their wounds. Characters could place an injured friend there then, after obtaining the medical help their friend needs, return to retrieve him or her. Minion hunters doing this had better be sure that they will be able to retrieve this individual promptly or else they will have condemned someone to an endless limbo of horrific hallucinations and eventual madness, a torture from which death offers no release.

While putting friends in the interstices may be a bad idea, they are an ideal place to put enemies who do not have the powers of Dimension Walk. Characters with the Interrogation skill who are interviewing prisoners who have been left in the interstices long enough to hallucinate will find their task to be one level easier than normal. If the hallucinations have been allowed to reach the horrific level, then the task will be two levels easier. This process will take at least two days though, and so will not be useful in a crisis situation.

Encounters in the Interstices

It is possible to have encounters in the interstices. The creatures encountered there are, like the characters, trapped in the interstices. Consult the following table to produce interstitial encounters (referees should roll once for every eight hours spent in the interstices). All encounters are at the extreme range of vision (as noted above). Other encounters may take place at the referee's option.



Interstitial Encounter Table

D6 Roll Encounter

1-3 **Physical Entity:** The encounter is with another physical entity, possibly an Earthly human, possibly a humanoid creature from one of the proto-dimensions, possibly a marooned Darkling. The entity is quite mad and will behave in a totally irrational manner. Assume that the entity is only capable of hand-to-hand combat at a reduced damage and skill rating due to damage from previous encounters. This pathetic creature is likely to break off its attack as quickly as it began.

4 **Interrupter:** The encounter is with an interrupter (see page 53) which has destroyed a pair of dimensional anchors and has fallen into the interstices. If every empathic character can roll their Empathy or *greater* on a D10, then the interrupter will simply drift past, but if one of the characters fails this roll, then the interrupter will detect them and swerve toward them. Characters who have already begun to hallucinate must subtract 1 from their die roll; characters who have gone onto horrific hallucinations must subtract 2; and characters who have developed an insanity must subtract 3.

If the interrupter does attack the characters, it will attempt to grab its assailant with one of its tentacles (skill 6). If it succeeds, it will begin to drain Empathy, and then Intelligence from its target at the rate of 1 point per turn. When a victim's Intelligence reaches 0, that victim will die—this is, in fact, the only way to die while in the interstices. Empathy and Intelligence which have been drained by an interrupter will return at 1 point per hour once the victim escapes. It is a Difficult task of Strength to tear free from an interrupter.

Interrupters have an overall armor value of 1 and 100 hits worth of tentacles, all of which must be destroyed to render the device/creature harmless.

Shooting the tentacles with normal ammunition or setting fire to them does little good, which leaves explosives and physical attacks with edged weapons like machetes as the most effective weapons. It is possible to attack the nucleus of the device with normal gunfire, but hitting it requires an aimed attack. All damage done by aimed attacks on the nucleus should be halved before it is applied to the device.

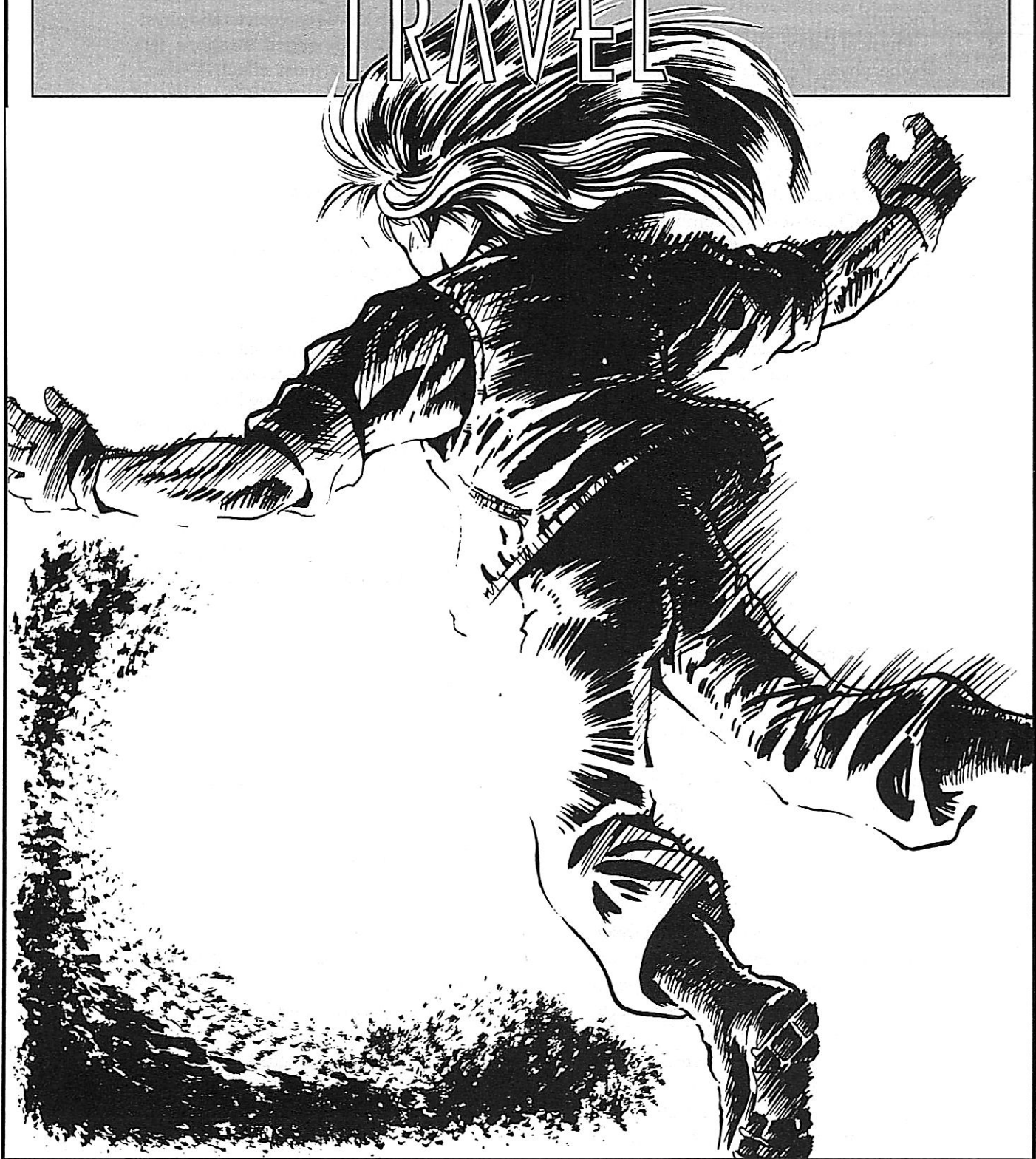
Interrupters move as if they had a combined Intelligence and Empathy score of 12. Characters who can travel 13 meters per phase while in the interstices can effectively escape from an interrupter. Unfortunately, those who cannot escape are in the most danger of being killed by one. Fast travellers can tow slow ones at the loss of two meters per combat phase.

5 **Bleak:** The encounter is with a bleak which attacks the characters and attempts to drain their life forces. While it is normally impossible to age in the interstices, or suffer any of the other ravages of time, the bleak's attack will be an exception to this rule. The bleak can be destroyed in the usual way (see *Dark Conspiracy*, page 212).

6 **Haunt:** The encounter is with a Haunt, which begins to pursue the party and harass them with its empathic abilities. The haunt will do its best to accelerate the characters' descent into madness by draining their Willpower. Haunts will follow maddened or very injured individuals until they exit the interstices in hopes that they will die from their condition soon afterwards. (see *Dark Conspiracy*, page 222).

Destroying Haunts: *Dark Conspiracy* does not tell you how to kill a haunt. This is because haunts can only be destroyed in the interstices, and only then by the use of Project Thought. An attacking character must achieve at least a Stage Four success against a haunt in order to permanently dissipate its essence (destroy it).

INTERDIMENSIONAL TRAVEL





This chapter discusses empathic interdimensional travel. The most convenient method of travel between the proto-dimensions and Earth is by means of the Dimension Walk skill, but before summarizing the rules relating to that skill, we will lay out some historical background.

Primitive Man and the Proto-Dimensions

The first humans who travelled to the proto-dimensions probably did not initiate those journeys themselves. It is most likely that they slipped through holes in the interdimensional fabric, weak spots in reality, and found themselves somewhere else. The vast majority of them quickly died as a result of their misfortune, landing in places totally inhospitable to any life. A few might have survived for a time, trapped in unfamiliar worlds with no companionship besides the bizarre creatures that roamed there. These peculiar disappearances went on for some time without notice. In humanity's primeval past, death was always lurking just out of view and disappearances were a fact of life—life was harsh, and predators were strong and numerous.

After time, however, there were cases where people vanished in front of witnesses. These events were the seeds for legends. Many tales were told of those who were whisked away by magic spells, or were carried off to the realm of the gods.

Eventually there were those who returned home after blundering into a proto-dimension. Some of these individuals were early empaths, rare individuals who were capable of walking between the dimensions—most were just lucky. Either way, the return to their home villages would cause changes. Some would be shunned, others revered. Some villagers would accuse these returned travellers of being rejected by the gods, or in league with demons. Others would revere them as prophets, sages with secret wisdom to shed light on an incomprehensible world.

Mystic traditions formed around some of these interdimensional travellers. Their followers would undertake vigils and vision quests in hopes of seeing "the lands beyond." Of course, in most cases, neither the voyagers nor their followers had the power with which to breach the interdimensional barriers, and so they

never saw the proto-dimensions again. Sometimes these mystic schools would develop into primitive religions, and the proto-dimensions would provide the images for heavens and hells. Other times, after nothing had come of their efforts, they would simply disband.

Only very rarely would the early interdimensional walkers have the empathic abilities necessary to return to the proto-dimensions. More rarely still, they were able to gather a few followers who were also able to dimension walk. Over time, the first schools of sorcery were born.

The First Darklings

Just as the first dimensional travellers from this universe leaked into the proto-dimensions, there were things—sometimes like humans, sometimes not—which seeped into this universe. Before 1983, when the ETs opened the gate on Io, entry to the universe of Earth was almost impossible for Darklings. For reasons not completely understood, the pathways to Earth were almost completely closed to them.

Humanity's encounters with these extra-dimensional beings were rare, but not soon forgotten. They were passed down from generation to generation as the basis of a body of myth and legend. After several generations of telling, there was very little of the original truth left in these tales. Some were modified by early poets and storytellers to make a better tale, such as the story of Beowulf or the tale of St. George and his battle with a dragon. Others were commonly used by various religions to illustrate some moral lesson. This is why the Darklings remind us so much of the devils and monsters of primitive legend—although the Darkling invasion is a new phenomenon, a scant few managed to leak through in the past and become the basis of many tales of devils and monsters. The monsters of our myth and our nightmares are dimly viewed reflections of an unspeakably horrible reality.

Dimension Walking Now

The dimension walkers of the 21st century, if anything, have it worse than their predecessors. Science has carefully codified what is real and what isn't and most people, even the most open-minded, are not prepared to confront that which they "know" is not real. Practitioners of the various religions, people who



should be less existentially minded, also tend to scoff at the stories a dimension walker might tell.

Worse by far than simply being disbelieved, or even accused of being in league with the forces of darkness, there is the possibility that the dimension walker will relate their tales within earshot of an individual who works for the Darklings. Turncoat humans and human-looking Darklings exist. Certainly, the Dark Ones will not voluntarily permit any dimension walkers that they locate to live for long.

The dimension walkers of the early 21st century have one other danger to face and one other responsibility to meet—both one and the same thing. Since the ETs opened the gate on Io, the proto-dimensions have become more and more dangerous. Places that were once lush and green, perhaps the inspiration behind half a dozen religions' images of heaven, would today inspire a view of hell. Earth, too, is becoming more and more hellish. Those who have the gift—the power to travel between the dimensions—have with it the responsibility to combat and turn back the invaders.

The Uses of Dimension Walk

The empathic skill Dimension Walk is, apart from dealings with DarkTek, the only way humans can travel between Earth and the proto-dimensions. No place in the meta-verse is off limits to a powerful enough dimension walker.

Traveling to far-off locales isn't the only application of Dimension Walk. Not sure how to explain the dead Morlock to the local authorities? Open a portal into another proto-dimension and toss it through. Need to defuse a bomb? Just send it somewhere where it can't explode, or at least won't do any damage if it does. Need to breach perimeter security at a secret government base? What perimeter security? With a side trip into a nearby proto-dimension, you could materialize somewhere well within the base. Of course, these aren't special skills, just tricks—unorthodox uses of the portals which a dimension walker would normally use to move into another proto-dimension.

There are other applications of the Dimension Walk skill which are very different from trans-dimensional travel. Dimension walkers may use the same powers that they use to open portals between proto-dimensions to close the permanent gateways which the Dark Lords sometimes build. This task, described in detail in the section on interdimensional gates (see pages 46-48), is not an easy one. They can also do a dimensional scan to attempt to discover what proto-dimension another dimension walker has gone to.

Sorcerers, mystics, and psionics have a variety of cascade skills based on Dimension Walk. Sorcerers, for example, can use interdimensional portals to throw balls of fire, fly, and pass through solid objects, among other things (see the *Empathic Sourcebook* for details).

Learning to Dimension Walk

Learning to dimension walk is a complex, multi-step process. When learning normal skills, students usually watch their teacher perform a few tasks and then try it themselves with the teacher giving them advice as they go along. The difference between learning Dimension Walk and other complex skills is that an experienced teacher cannot immediately assist the student with the task.

To use an analogy, the Mechanic skill is like learning to fly an airplane. The teacher is right there in the



cockpit, ready to take over if problems arise. Dimension Walk is more like learning to use a parachute. Teachers can tell their students what they should do under different circumstances, but once a student has jumped out of the plane it is too late to ask questions. Students who live through parachute mishaps may ask their teachers for advice after they have recovered,

but during the first attempt they are on their own.

The best method for learning the Dimension Walk skill is for the students to be empathically linked to their teachers, either with Human Empathy or Telepathy while the teachers actually perform the task. This allows the students to see what it "feels" like to perform the Dimension Walk task.

PORTALS: SOME DESCRIPTIVE MECHANICS

What happens when a character walks through a portal? As mentioned in the sidebar Sensing A Portal (see page 44), the entrance to a portal appears as a rough square, through which the other proto-dimension can be seen, as if projected on an infinitely thin movie screen. This screen offers no resistance to objects moving through it, and light can pass freely (but sound waves cannot).

The empath creating the portal decides where the entrance is located, and what direction it "faces." The empath must be within eight meters of some part of the entrance.

The instant that more than 90% of a being or object has passed through the plane of the screen, that person or object is in the other proto-dimension (entering a portal counts as an action in combat). Living entities pass through with the same vector (speed and direction) they had upon entering. Non-living objects (with some exceptions) do not. Clothing, equipment, and vehicles benefit from a sort of "life force" field that enables characters to walk through a portal wearing clothing or drive a vehicle through a portal without hindrance. Light passes through without being effected, but heat does not. Missiles and inanimate objects not receiving the benefit of the "life force" pass through, but retain none of their previous vector. What this means in practice is that bullets, arrows, thrown rocks, and the like will be transported to the other dimension, but will appear there without any momentum energy. A bullet will appear in the air just on the other side of the portal, and will then fall to the ground as the force of gravity takes over (assuming the other proto-dimension has gravity). The same thing will happen to thrown arrows, rocks, wind-blown leaves, and fragments from an exploding claymore mine. Characters could stand just on the other side of a portal from an exploding hand grenade and be unharmed (except perhaps the light from the explosion might flash-blind them temporarily, like the afterimage of a photographic flashbulb). A windblown insect or a bird in flight, however, would enter the other proto-dimension travelling at the same vector it entered the portal. DarkTek with an organic component counts as alive. Robots and intelligent machines are not alive for this purpose.

Referees should exercise common sense in applying this rule. Bacteria or fungus on a thrown rock will not count the same as the passengers in a car. Objects do not chill to absolute zero when they pass through, but molten lava from Gehenna will come through as room-temperature volcanic rock. A candle carried by a person will remain lit, but a torch thrown through will not.

Entrances to interdimensional portals are one-sided—viewed from the "other side" they appear as black rectangles. For example, Roman creates a portal in the middle of an open field. Roman is facing north, and decides that the portal will appear one meter in front of him, with its opening facing him (i.e., south). Two other characters are also standing on the field, both non-empaths—Rosenkranz two meters due south of Roman, and Guilderstern two meters due north. Rosenkranz can see the portal entrance, and can see Roman (outlined by the other proto-dimension), but cannot see Guilderstern any more, because the portal is now in the way. Guilderstern sees the portal as a black rectangle, as the light that passes through it ends up in another proto-dimension. He can no longer see the others.

Roman takes a few steps forward, is transported to the other proto-dimension, and turns 180°. Rosenkranz can still see him, but now sees him as an image on the "movie screen" of the portal entrance. Guilderstern sees no change. Roman can still see Rosenkranz, but Rosenkranz appears to Roman in the "movie screen" that the portal appears to be in the other dimension.

Guilderstern now walks a few paces south, and walks through the black rectangle in front of him, encountering no resistance. Rosenkranz sees Guilderstern appear in front of the portal. Roman sees Guilderstern appear in front of him, between himself and Rosenkranz. Guilderstern suddenly no longer sees the black rectangle, but now sees Rosenkranz and the countryside behind him.

If Guilderstern were to take two steps backward, he would pass through the portal to the other proto-dimension, and probably back into Roman (unless the empath side-stepped out of the way).



In game terms, characters intending to learn the Dimension Walk skill during character generation should follow the rules laid down in the **Empathic Sourcebook**. Characters intending to learn the Dimension Walk skill during play may not begin unless they have a teacher, or have been taken into a proto-dimension. Once characters have a Dimension Walk ability of 1, they may improve it in the same manner as any other empathic skill. New proto-dimensions can be learned from other empathes (through Telepathy or Human Empathy) or through experience (actually going to a new proto-dimension). Referees should keep in mind that most dimension walkers will not teach every proto-dimension that they know to every empath they encounter. This is especially true in the case of proto-dimensions which are free of the Darkling blight—empaths who have extra-dimensional safe houses aren't going to reveal them to everyone they meet. Members of a single empathic cell or a small team of minion hunters might share such information, but they would be unlikely to share too much of their knowledge with outsiders without a very good reason.

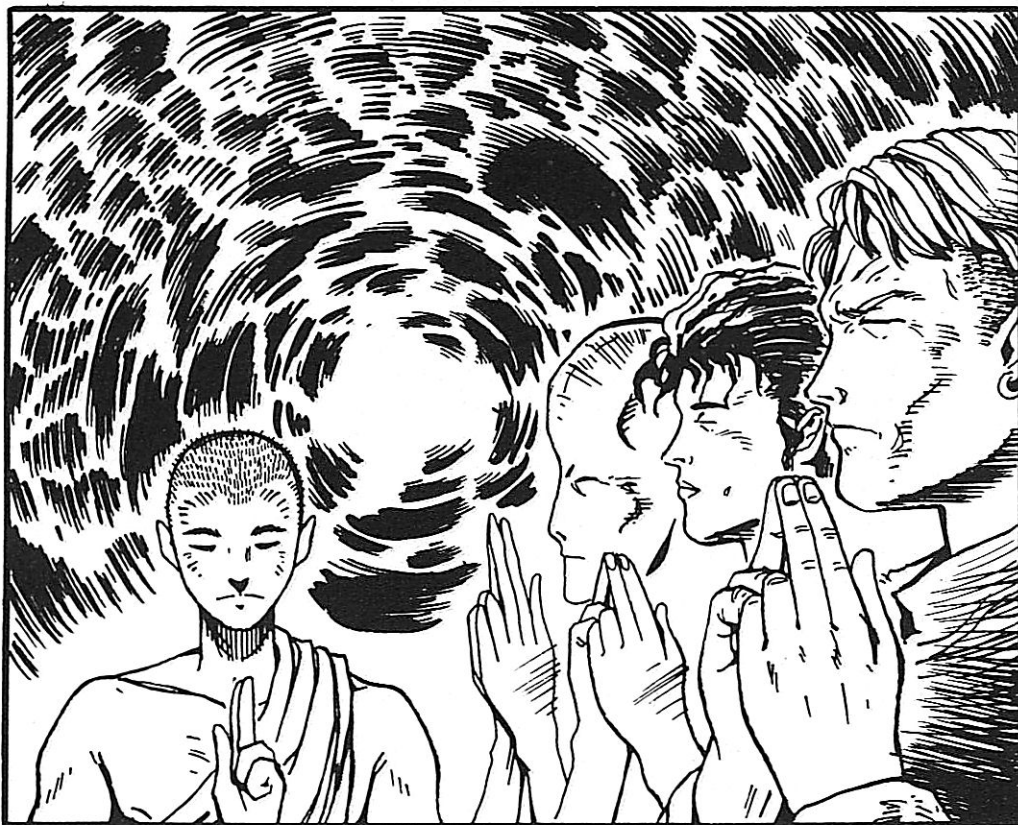
Familiarity: As was stated in the **Empathic Sourcebook**, no user of Dimension Walk or any of its cascades can interact with any proto-dimension they are not familiar with. Since spending time in a proto-dimension gives the student the necessary psychic impression of it, teachers often introduce the various proto-dimensions to their students by taking them there. Most teachers of Dimension Walk begin by teaching their students to enter Earth's quantum proto-dimensions (see page 13) due to the ease of the task. Then, as training progresses, the teacher will usually take the student into the other proto-dimensions which they want them to know of.

It is also possible to exchange the psychic impressions of a proto-dimension with Project Thought, Telepathy, or similar empathic means. For such a task to work normally, a stage three success is required. Students who learn of a new proto-dimension via Project Thought will find that the difficulty level of their first trip there is one level more difficult if the link with their teachers was only at Stage Two, and two levels more difficult if the link was only at Stage One.

Starting characters will only know how to enter a

few proto-dimensions. Neuropaths will only know of the quantum proto-dimensions. Psionics and mystics will be familiar with a number of proto-dimensions equal to their Dimension Walk skill. These will always be proto-dimensions which have low discontinuities, usually 1, rarely as high as 2.

Sorcerers will know of a number of proto-dimensions equal to twice their Dimension Walk skill, and, additionally, know of certain fragmentary proto-dimensions from which they can draw the power for their various sorcerous feats. These fragmentary proto-dimensions are all very inhospitable to humans and would kill them in the blink of an eye. Needless to say, sorcerers—at least those who want to remain alive—will not enter these proto-dimensions.





Dimension Walk: A Step-by-Step Analysis

Like any other task a **Dark Conspiracy** character might attempt, the Dimension Walk task can be broken down into several smaller jobs. The first of these jobs that empathaths must perform is warping space-time with their empathic abilities to form portals. It is these portals that allow them to slip out of one proto-dimension and into another.

The next technique that empathaths must master is sometimes referred to as *seeking*. What this power allows them to do is to find the proto-dimension to which they want to travel. Empathaths must learn to reach out with their minds through the portal they have created and scan the interstices, looking for the target proto-dimension. As was stated above (under "Familiarity"), it is only possible for empathaths to locate dimensions which they have actually visited.

Once the target proto-dimension is found, empathaths must connect the portal to it. The two entrances, both of which resonate with the empathic energies of the dimension walker who opened them, are "in phase" with one another. They are automatically connected. After they are open, all that is left for the dimension walker to do is step through the portal out of the source dimension and into the target dimension.

All of this is done as a single task roll, the specifics of which are detailed later.

The Dangers of Dimension Walk

The Dimension Walk skill is, as any sorcerer will attest, one of the most dangerous empathic skills to learn and/or use. Opening a portal causes "ripples" among the proto-dimensions. The longer such portals are held open and the greater the discontinuity between the two proto-dimensions involved, the larger the ripples will be. The Dark Ones can detect a dimension walker from the presence of these ripples and, if the Dimension Walk skill is used for a long enough time, they can zero-in for the kill.

Sorcerers are in the greatest danger since they specialize in Dimension Walk, but no empath who uses the Dimension Walk skill is safe from this phenomenon either. This is one of the reasons that there are so few neuropaths with the Dimension Walk skill. It is not that

they are unable to develop the skill without a tutor, just that without the wisdom and warnings of a skilled dimension walker, they usually don't live through enough practice to master it.

If a mistake is made while scanning for the target proto-dimension, it is possible to connect with the wrong proto-dimension. This is one way to find new proto-dimensions—it is also a good way to die a horrible death. In the worst possible case, the proto-dimension's environment will be instantly fatal. More commonly, this will merely force "lost" dimension walkers to loiter in an unfamiliar proto-dimension while they try to get their bearings—dangerous but not necessarily fatal.

If the portal into the target proto-dimension is not properly opened, the dimension walker could end up in the interstices. This is usually worse than going to the wrong proto-dimension, as escaping from the interstices is very difficult, and an extended stay there can drive a person mad.

THE DIMENSION WALK TASK

There are many factors involved in interdimensional travel. This makes resolving a Dimension Walk task slightly more involved than many other **Dark Conspiracy** tasks, but the same general sequence applies: Determine the difficulty level of the task, apply any level modifiers, calculate the target number, and make the die roll.

Note: Mystics may substitute Astral Travel skill for Dimension Walk skill when opening portals to proto-dimensions.

Determining the Difficulty Level

First, the difficulty of the task must be determined. There are two factors involved in determining the difficulty of a Dimension Walk task. The first factor is the difference between the discontinuity of the source proto-dimension and that of the target proto-dimension. For every point of difference between the source proto-dimension and the target proto-dimension's discontinuity, the task becomes one level more difficult. So, for example, moving from Earth (which, by definition has a discontinuity of 0) to a proto-dimension with a discontinuity of 2 would be a Difficult task (Easy for 0, Average for 1, Difficult for 2).



Weakening the Interdimensional Fabric

The holes that interdimensional travellers open never close completely. Dimension walkers who allow their portals to collapse naturally, and observe carefully, will see that while they diminish rapidly in the first few seconds (and become useless for interdimensional travel), the process slows down as time passes. A few minutes after a portal begins to close, it will be a microscopic spot, but by the time these portals reach the size of a single atom they have virtually stopped closing. Even portals closed by the will of an empath never completely disappear.

Walking through the spot where a portal recently (within 24 hours) was closed will cause anyone who does so a sharp, sudden pain, as if they had been stuck with by a very long pin. They will, however, suffer no damage, and the pain will vanish in an instant. After a full day, the portal will be small enough to pass unnoticed through a human being.

This does not mean that these sub-atomic-sized micro-portals do not have any macroscopic effect. Once a few hundred micro-portals collect in an area, they will noticeably weaken the interdimensional separation there. Attempts to dimension walk to and from this weakened location will be one level easier, much like Demonground. In fact, it is likely that a place which has been altered this way will become Demonground in time. This is one of the reasons why sorcerers must keep moving. If they don't, their activities will create patches of the very Demonground which they are fighting against.

Charons frequently open portals at random to expedite this process. Often they will attempt to pass themselves off as kindly sorcerers and teach young empaths just enough of the Dimension Walk skill to allow them to open portals, then they abandon them. These unfortunate students usually do not last very long if they continue to practice the techniques which the Charons have taught them. They either end up in the Interstices or the victim of some minion of the Dark Ones. The Charons don't care—they will find other empathic dupes to be their "apprentices." All that is important to the Charons is the fact that every portal that is opened weakens the Earth's dimensional barrier a little more.

The most curious thing about this phenomenon is that the truth of the matter is not hinted at in folklore. In virtually every legend involving sorcery or mages, the use of magic depletes the Earth's reserve of arcane power and makes further use more difficult. Yet what actually occurs is the very opposite. Every use makes future use a little easier until, ultimately, the region is so "magically" active that it is unsafe for human habitation. Likewise, the mages found in folklore are usually hesitant to take new students, but Charons are eager to "honor" unskilled empaths by teaching them just enough to be hazardous. Some minion hunters theorize that these tales have been spread by Charons over the centuries. If prospective students/victims believe that sorcerers rarely take protégés into their tutelage, then they will be less likely to question their master's motives—which is, of course, exactly what the Charons hope for.

The second factor is that creatures who are from a proto-dimension with a certain discontinuity are empathically repelled when trying to access proto-dimensions with different discontinuities. A human attempting to dimension walk to a proto-dimension with a discontinuity of 2 would find it to be a Difficult task (Easy for entering a 0, Average for entering a 1, Difficult for entering a 2, and so on).

These effects are additive. Using both factors, it is an Impossible task for humans to move from Earth to a proto-dimension with a discontinuity of 2 (two shifts for the difference between the discontinuities and two for the repulsion the proto-dimension has for the human empath's psyche).

These factors, taken together, yield the Combined Dimension Walk Difficulty Table (see facing page) for beings (human or Darkling) attempting a Dimension Walk task.

To use this table, the referee should determine the difference between the discontinuity of the being's home proto-dimension and its source dimension, and then perform the same calculation for the being's target dimension. Cross-referencing the two numbers will reveal the task's difficulty. The "H" line under Source and the "H" column under Target represent the being's home proto-dimension or a proto-dimension with the same discontinuity.

The Human Dimension Walk Difficulty Table (see page 38) is a portion of the table on page 37, designed specifically for use by human dimension walkers. It eliminates irrelevant portions of the table, and thus incorporates only the lower right quadrant. This table is more compact, easier to use, and less confusing to look at. To use this table, simply cross-index the discontinuity of the source proto-dimension (the Source column) with the discontinuity of the target proto-dimension (Target), and read off the resulting difficulty level. Zero discontinuity represents Earth, or a place almost completely identical to it.

Neither tables take into account the Dimension Walk task difficulty level modifiers which will now be discussed.

Difficulty Level Modifiers: There are several factors which can modify the difficulty which the tables yield. Like all Empathy tasks, the difficulty of Dimension Walk is raised or lowered by the stress of the environment in which an empath has to work. It is one



started during the phase in which the task was attempted, an Average: Willpower task roll must be made. If the roll is a failure, then the portal degenerates before the empath (or anyone else) can move through it. An empath who succeeds at a Dimension Walk task, but then fumbles due to a failed Willpower roll, does not have to spend much time trying to regain composure, and may try the task again during the next combat turn.

For example, Darla is in Grey and wants to travel to Airborne. Airborne has a discontinuity of 2. This would be an Impossible task if Darla was on Earth, but since Grey also has a discontinuity of 2, the task is merely Difficult. While not very dangerous, Grey is too weird for Darla to be relaxed enough to get any environment bonuses. The task is Difficult, and Darla's Dimension Walk asset is 6, so her player needs a D20 roll of 6 or less to succeed. Her player rolls the D20 and gets a 14, a failure, but not Catastrophic Failure. Since her die roll minus her target number equals 8 (14-6=8), Darla must wait eight minutes before she can attempt the task again.

Another example: Silicia the dark elf is "withdrawing" from a group of minion hunters while they finish off two of her cohorts ("better them than me" is Silicia's motto). She decides to escape into the proto-dimensions and hope that the humans will either be unable to dimension walk or will not know

the proto-dimension she has gone to. She picks Gothic, with a discontinuity of 2, as a likely destination. Since Gothic has a discontinuity one higher than her home proto-dimension, and Earth's discontinuity is one lower, the referee checks the -1, +1 intersection on the Combined Dimension Walk Difficulty Table and finds that this is a Formidable task. Since humans with automatic weapons are chasing her, the task is one level more difficult, or Impossible—a long shot, even for a powerful dimension walker like Silicia. Her target number is 5, but the referee rolls 18 on a D20. The referee rolls again and gets a 7—Silicia's attempt has ended in Catastrophic Failure and the referee decides that she has been pitched into the Interstices, an ignominious fate, even for a Darkling.

Stages of Success

If empaths succeed at the Dimension Walk task, then the referee should roll for their stage of success. Stage of success is determined by computing the power level (as noted on page 13 of *Empathic Sourcebook*) according to the following formula:

$$\text{Power Level} = \text{Empath's EMP Attribute} + \text{Skill Level} + 1\text{D}10 - (\text{target's Willpower} + \text{INT})$$

The formula can be modified for the purposes of Dimension Walk tasks to:

$$\text{Power Level} = \text{Empath's Dimension Walk Asset} + 1\text{D}10$$

After the Power Level is computed, the result is compared to the *Empathic Power Level Table*, which gives the stage of success.

Empathic Power Level Table

(for use with the Revised D20 system)

Power Level	Stage
0 or less	No Effect
1-9	Basic Success
10-17	Stage Two
18-27	Stage Three
28-36	Stage Four
37-45	Stage Five
46 or more	Stage Six

Human Dimension Walk Difficulty Table

Source	Target					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
0	E	D	I	—	—	—
1	A	A	F	8	—	—
2	D	D	D	I	—	—
3	F	F	F	F	8	—
4	I	I	I	I	I	—
5	8	8	8	8	8	8
6	—	—	—	—	—	—

E: Easy task; D: Difficult task; F: Formidable task; I: Impossible task; 8: The empath(s) must roll against their Dimension Walk asset divided by 8; —: Humans do not possess the raw empathic power required to make such a trip.



Players should spend some time deciding how their characters will utilize the stages of success to modify *portal size, duration, accuracy, skew, and vertical offset*. Each of these categories will be discussed more fully below. Since they will not know how successful they were until after they have arrived at their destination, they must be very cautious. If players plan on having their characters dimension walk to the 75th floor of an office building they will want to be sure that their characters will come out inside the building before they spend any stages of success on changing their altitude.

Note that all of the tables below read in terms of *success factors*. Neuropaths, psionics, and mystics may improve their results by two factors for every stage of success they have available. Sorcerers may improve their results by three factors for every stage of success. This means that a sorcerer who has achieved Stage Three success may purchase nine different factors from the various improvements listed below, either all from one category or from a mixture of the various categories.

Portal Size: The entry to a standard human-created portal appears as a roughly square opening two meters wide and 2.5 meters tall, leading into another proto-dimension, which is large enough for two characters of normal height to walk through, side by side, without ducking. Each success factor spent improving size will double either the width or the height of the opening, at the empath's option. Empaths who wish to

create a portal large enough to drive a 2½-ton truck through will need to spend a few success factors enlarging the opening.

Any being or object that does not fit completely within the boundary of the portal will not be transmitted. Upon moving through the portal, they (or it) will end up where they would have been had the portal not been there.

Duration: Duration is the amount of time a portal will remain open at a useful size. If no success factors are spent on duration, the portal will materialize in front of the empath who created it and only remain open long enough for that individual to step through. There will not be enough time before the portal's collapse for the empath to move out of the way and allow another individual through.

Assume, for questions involving the duration of a portal, that the empath who created a portal may move through it in the last instant of the combat phase in which the portal was opened. If a portal is opened for an extra phase, it is the phase immediately following the phase in which it was opened, not the phase it was opened in.

These success factors are different from those given in *Dark Conspiracy* and the *Empathic Sourcebook*. This is due to the addition of accuracy, skew, and vertical offset. There are now more factors for the dimension walker to be concerned with, and without this change it would be nearly impossible for a dimension walker to take a friend along and manage any accuracy or a useful amount of skew.

Multiple-Step Trips

Many proto-dimensions cannot be entered directly from Earth due to their high discontinuities. The dimensional traveller must make a multi-step journey, travelling to proto-dimensions of increasingly higher discontinuities, in much the same way as a hiker can cross a stream by short hops from stone to stone rather than in a single superhuman leap. Instead of travelling from a discontinuity of 0 to a discontinuity of 3 (something which cannot be accomplished by a human), the empath might go from a 0 to a 1 (a Difficult task), then from 1 to 2 (a Formidable task), then from 2 to 3 (an Impossible task). After each trip, the empath must spend a certain amount of time reorienting and plotting his or her next jump. This time is equal to 20 minutes minus the numerical value of the empath's Dimension Walk skill; that is, an empath with a Dimension Walk skill of 8 would have to spend 12 minutes in reorientation and preparation before opening another portal. During this time, the empath and any companions are vulnerable to any environmental effects the proto-dimension may have, and to encounters. Each step counts as a separate "dimension walk to another proto-dimension" for the purposes of alerting Darklings (see the Dimension Walk Detection Table, page 41).

No empath may use a proto-dimension as a "stepping-stone" without being familiar with that proto-dimension. Sorcerers are an exception to this rule—see the sidebar "Special Abilities of Sorcerers" (page 40).



The creator of a portal may will it to close at any time, and it will immediately collapse to a size too small to be of use. This enables an empath to close a portal before the time specified by the Duration Table, below.

Permanent portals, which could be made with a Stage Six success in **Dark Conspiracy** and the **Empathic Sourcebook**, can still be created, but only if a pair of dimensional anchors is installed.

Duration Table

Success Factors	Effect
0	The portal is only open long enough for its creator to pass through.
1	The portal is open for one combat phase longer than its creator would require to pass through.
2	The portal is open for three combat phases longer than its creator would require to pass through.
3	The portal is open for a number of phases equal to its creator's Dimension Walk asset.
4	The portal is open for a number of phases equal to twice its creator's Dimension Walk asset.

5+ The length of time the portal remains open is equal to the duration in entry #4 doubled for each success factor over 4. For five success factors, double twice (2×2) for six success factors, double three times ($2 \times 2 \times 2$) for seven success factors, double four times for eight success factors, and so on.

Example: Reynard wants to travel from his kitchen (a secure environment, at least if you don't mind his cooking) on Earth to Mechaniaca (which has a discontinuity of 1). The task would normally be Difficult Dimension Walk, but the bonus of a secure environment makes it Average. Reynard's Empathy attribute is 4 and his Dimension Walk skill is 3, so his asset is 7 ($3+4$) and his target number is 14 ($2 \times 7 = 14$). Reynard's player rolls the D20 and gets a 3—not only is Reynard successful, but this is an Outstanding Success. The referee rolls a 9 on a D20 and adds 7 (Reynard's Empathy attribute of 4 plus his Dimension Walk skill level of 3), getting 16. He doubles the total (due to the fact that the attempt was an Outstanding Success) and ends up with a power level of 32 which results in a Stage Four success. Reynard is not a sorcerer, so his four stages of success will only buy

Special Abilities of Sorcerers

Sorcerers, because they specialize in Dimension Walk, have special abilities not possessed by other empaths.

For sorcerers it is one level less difficult to open a portal to any quantum proto-dimension. This makes sorcerers very valuable to any group wanting to get somewhere on Earth in a hurry.

As noted elsewhere in this book, all empaths can make multiple-step journeys in order to travel to the higher discontinuity proto-dimensions, limited only by their familiarity with the proto-dimensions used as stepping stones. Sorcerers do this differently. Using the analogy of crossing a stream on stepping stones, other empaths must be able to see the stones they use, but sorcerers create their own stones with each step.

These proto-dimensional "stepping stones" are a degenerate mixture of the sorcerer's source and target proto-dimensions. How these degenerate proto-dimensions exist is unknown—they cannot be seen from the astral proto-dimension/interstices, nor can they be entered by other types of empaths. Characters who are in these stepping-stone proto-dimensions will suffer half of the environmental effects of both the source and target proto-dimensions and may encounter creatures from either proto-dimension's random encounter tables. The stepping-stone proto-dimensions vanish once the creating sorcerer leaves them (so it is a good move for his or her companions to move out first).

The number of stepping-stones proto-dimensions that must be travelled by a sorcerer is equal to the difference between the discontinuity of the source proto-dimension and target proto-dimension. A trip from a proto-dimension with a discontinuity of 1 and one with a discontinuity of 4 would require three ($4-1$) intervening "stepping-stones." At each stepping-stone proto-dimension entered, the sorcerer must spend a certain amount of time re-orienting and plotting her or his next jump. This time is equal to 20 minutes minus the numerical value of the sorcerer's Dimension Walk skill (as noted under Multiple-Step Trips, page 39).

Each step counts as a separate "dimension walk to another proto-dimension" for the purposes of alerting Darklings (see the Dimension Walk Detection Table, page 41).



eight success factors. Reynard's player, of course, doesn't know what Reynard's stage of success was. The plan was for Reynard to take several other PCs with him, so Reynard's player tells the referee that he wants to spend all of his stages of success on duration. Reynard's eight success factors will keep a portal open for twice Reynard's Dimension Walk asset doubled four times, or $(7 \times 2) \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 = 224$ five-second phases. This is more than 18 minutes, far longer than Reynard really wanted the portal to be opened. Of course, Reynard can will the portal closed any time he wants, but all of the extra success factors go to waste (excess stages of success can't be saved for later tasks).

Accuracy: Accuracy is the degree to which a dimension walker manages to counteract the effects of the various intangible factors which make precise interdimensional travel impossible. The value given for each success factor is the maximum probable displacement from the location in the target proto-dimension that corresponds to the character's location in the source proto-dimension. The value given for the previous factor should be considered the minimum displacement. The referee should randomly determine exactly how far and in what direction the dimension walker ultimately ends up. One means of accomplishing this is to increase the lower number by a random percentage (a D100 roll) of the difference between the lower range and the upper range.

Accuracy Table

Success Factors	Effect
0	The portal deposits the interdimensional traveller 10,000 meters away from the target point at which the portal's creator was aiming.
1	The portal deposits the interdimensional traveller 5000 meters away from the target point at which portal's creator was aiming.

Dimension Walk Detection Table

Situation	Task Difficulty
Sorcerous Combat (atmosphere, gravity, temperature)	Easy
Sorcerous Combat (special)	Difficult
Sorcerous Flight for less than 15 minutes	Easy
Sorcerous Flight for more than 15 minutes	Average
Sorcerous Telekinesis	Average
Dimension Walk in same proto-dimension	Average
Extended Dimension Walk in same proto-dimension	Difficult
Dimension Walk to another proto-dimension	Difficult
Extended Dimension Walk to another proto-dimension	Formidable

Sorcerous Combat: Using sorcerous powers affecting atmosphere, gravity, or temperature in a combat situation.

Sorcerous Combat (Special): Using fire or lightning in combat. This manipulation is much finer and much more powerful, and is easily noticed.

Sorcerous Flight and Telekinesis: These are very fine manipulations of dimensional interfaces, and have a distinct pattern that alerts those cognizant of sorcery to their use.

Dimension Walk: The farther and longer you go, the more impact it has on the proto-dimensional fabric, and the more noticeable it is. The term "same proto-dimension" indicates portals opened on the same dimension for the purposes of speeding travel or avoiding obstacles. The term "another proto-dimension" involves opening a portal to another proto-dimension to observe or interact with it.

- The portal deposits the interdimensional traveller 1000 meters away from the target point at which the portal's creator was aiming.
- The portal deposits the interdimensional traveller 500 meters away from the target point at which the portal's creator was aiming.
- The portal deposits the interdimensional traveller 100 meters away from the target point at which the portal's creator was aiming.
- The portal deposits the interdimensional traveller 50 meters away from the target point at which the portal's creator was aiming.
- The portal deposits the interdimensional traveller 10 meters away from the target point at which the portal's creator was aiming.
- The portal deposits the interdimensional traveller 5 meters away from the target point at which the portal's creator was aiming. Precision greater than this is not possible for humans.



Example: Darla's player decides not to worry about accuracy at all. The referee figures she could end up anywhere from 5000 meters to 10,000 meters away from her target in any direction, a variation of 5000 (the difference between the lower range of 5000 and the upper range of 10,000) and decides to increase the lower range by a random percentage. The referee rolls percentile dice and gets a 61, indicating that Darla is a little more than 8000 meters away from her target (161% of 5000, or $1.61 \times 5000 = 8050$) and chooses northwest to be as good a direction as any. Of course,

the referee doesn't tell any of this to Darla's player. If she really wanted to know where Darla was going to end up, she should have spent at least a few success factors on accuracy.

Skew: Skew is a result of non-right angle travel (see "Correspondence and Skewed Travel," page 18), but skew is not inaccuracy. Inaccuracy is the result of several random factors; skew is the deliberately caused shifting the "trajectory" of a jump. By engaging in skewed travel, interdimensional voyagers can avoid long hikes by simply arriving closer to a goal than right-angle travel would take them.

The values given in the Skew Table represent the maximum amount of skew that is obtainable for a given success factor. Players are not required to use every millimeter of this distance, and may choose to use any fraction of it that they want to. The skew direction is also the choice of the players.

The only restriction to skewed travel is that the distance must be specified as an absolute range, and the direction must be specified as an absolute heading. So, "29 kilometers at a compass heading of 195° true" or "30 kilometers to the south" would both be acceptable, but "about two kilometers from the dark elf castle" would not be.

If players do not have a better idea of where they want to send their characters than "two kilometers from the dark elf castle," a Navigation task roll may be used instead. The roll may be made for any character in the group. It does not have to be the dimension walker, just someone who knows the lay of the land in the target proto-dimension. If the Navigation task roll is successful, the PCs end up about where they wanted to be. If not, then the referee should decide how far off-target the group ends up. Only one Navigation roll is allowed for a Dimension Walk attempt, and it should be made after the Dimension Walk task has been declared. Like an attempt to jump a broad chasm, characters cannot turn back in the middle of a Dimension Walk task just because they don't like where they're going to wind up.

Skew Table

Success

Factors Effect

0	The destination point may not be skewed at all.
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- 1 The destination point may be skewed by as much as 1 kilometer.
- 2 The destination point may be skewed by as much as 2.5 kilometers.
- 3 The destination point may be skewed by as much as 5 kilometers.
- 4 The destination point may be skewed by as much as 10 kilometers.
- 5 The destination point may be skewed by as much as 25 kilometers.
- 6 The destination point may be skewed by as much as 50 kilometers.
- 7 The destination point may be skewed by as much as 100 kilometers.
- 8 The destination point may be skewed by as much as 250 kilometers.

Skew in excess of 250 kilometers is not possible.

Example: Scirocco is on Gothic, in a spot he knows corresponds to a psychic research facility on Earth. He decides to transfer into Earth, but does not want to arrive in the facility, as he would have problems explaining his presence to the security guards there, and might end up staying permanently. Scirocco's player tells the referee that he wants to spend his first two factors on skew. No direction is specified. The referee determines that Scirocco gets one stage of success, enough to purchase two success factors, a skew of between 1 and 2.5 kilometers. The referee decides to split the difference, and Scirocco steps out of the portal 1.75 km away from the facility ($2.5 - 1 = 1.5$, $1.5 \div 2 = 0.75$, $1 + 0.75 = 1.75$), well outside its three-meter tall chain-link fence topped with a coil of razor wire.

Vertical Offset: Dimension walkers normally materialize at the same altitude that they were at the proto-dimension they left. Dimension walkers who are standing on the ground in one proto-dimension will end up standing on the ground in almost any other proto-dimension which they travel to (assuming the target proto-dimension has any ground at all). This conservation of altitude is maintained for characters no matter where they are. Dimension walking from the tenth floor of a building will deposit an empath 30 meters or more in the air in the proto-dimension that they arrive in. Dimension walking from a passenger jet in flight would leave an empath 10,000 meters off the ground.

Conversely, if a character is on the ground in one proto-dimension but wants to come out on the tenth floor of a building in another proto-dimension, it would be impossible—except for offset travel.

Offset travel is, in fact, a variation of skewed travel, but, for reasons which are not clear, it is much more difficult for empaths to skew their travel in the Z axis than it is for either the X or the Y axis. It is commonly hypothesized that this is more an effect of the psychological make-up of humans and that some Darklings can offset themselves vertically with equal ease as in the X and Y axes.

Because of its elevated cost for humans, players must purchase vertical offset separately from skew. However, they may not purchase more than eight factors of both. That is, if a character wants to spend six success factors on skew, only two factors may be spent on offset. This reflects the fact that the interdimensional medium is only so flexible.





Vertical Offset Table

Success Factors	Effect
0	The destination point may not be offset themselves at all.
1	The destination point may be offset by as much as 10 meters (about three floors).
2	The destination point may be offset by as much as 50 meters (about 15 floors).
3	The destination point may be offset by as much as 100 meters (about 30 floors).
4	The destination point may be offset by as much as 500 meters (about 150 floors).*
5	The destination point may be offset by as much as 1000 meters.
6	The destination point may be offset by as much as 5000 meters.†

* Upper limit of buildings on Earth.

† This is well into the altitudes used for aviation on Earth. Offset in excess of 5000 meters (five kilometers) is not possible.

Sensing A Portal

Opening a portal creates a "noise," but one that can be heard only by those with empathic talent. Human empaths will be able to "hear" the opening of a portal within 500 meters, and will be able to determine from what direction the "sound" came (although not all of them will know what it means). Darklings can sense portals from greater distances. Non-empaths will hear nothing.

Empaths in line of sight to a portal can see it, even in total darkness (although it will not illuminate anything else). To empaths, a portal appears as a rough rectangle, bounded by a glowing golden light, through which the other proto-dimension can be seen. To non-empaths, the only way a portal can be detected is by the different scene presented by whatever light from the other proto-dimension comes through the portal. A portal thus looks something like a movie screen, but it is a movie screen that you can walk through.

It is possible for non-empaths to walk through a portal and not realize what has happened to them, although this happens only when the source and target proto-dimensions are almost identical (for an example of this, see the chapter on the proto-dimension called Croatan, page 70).

Example: Dominic is on Earth just outside of a megacorp citadel. He decides to transfer into Gothic, move to where the citadel would be, then return to Earth so that he'll arrive inside the tower, preferably on one of the upper floors. His trip into Gothic is successful. On the return trip, Dominic's player tells the referee that he wants to buy five factors of accuracy and spend up to three others on offset. What he does not know is that the referee only rolled a 2 on the D20, and Dominic can only purchase two success factors. When he returns to Earth, he finds himself almost a kilometer away from the tower. If Dominic's player hadn't specified that the accuracy should be purchased before the offset, Dominic would have been as much as 10 kilometers away from the tower and 30 floors off the ground.

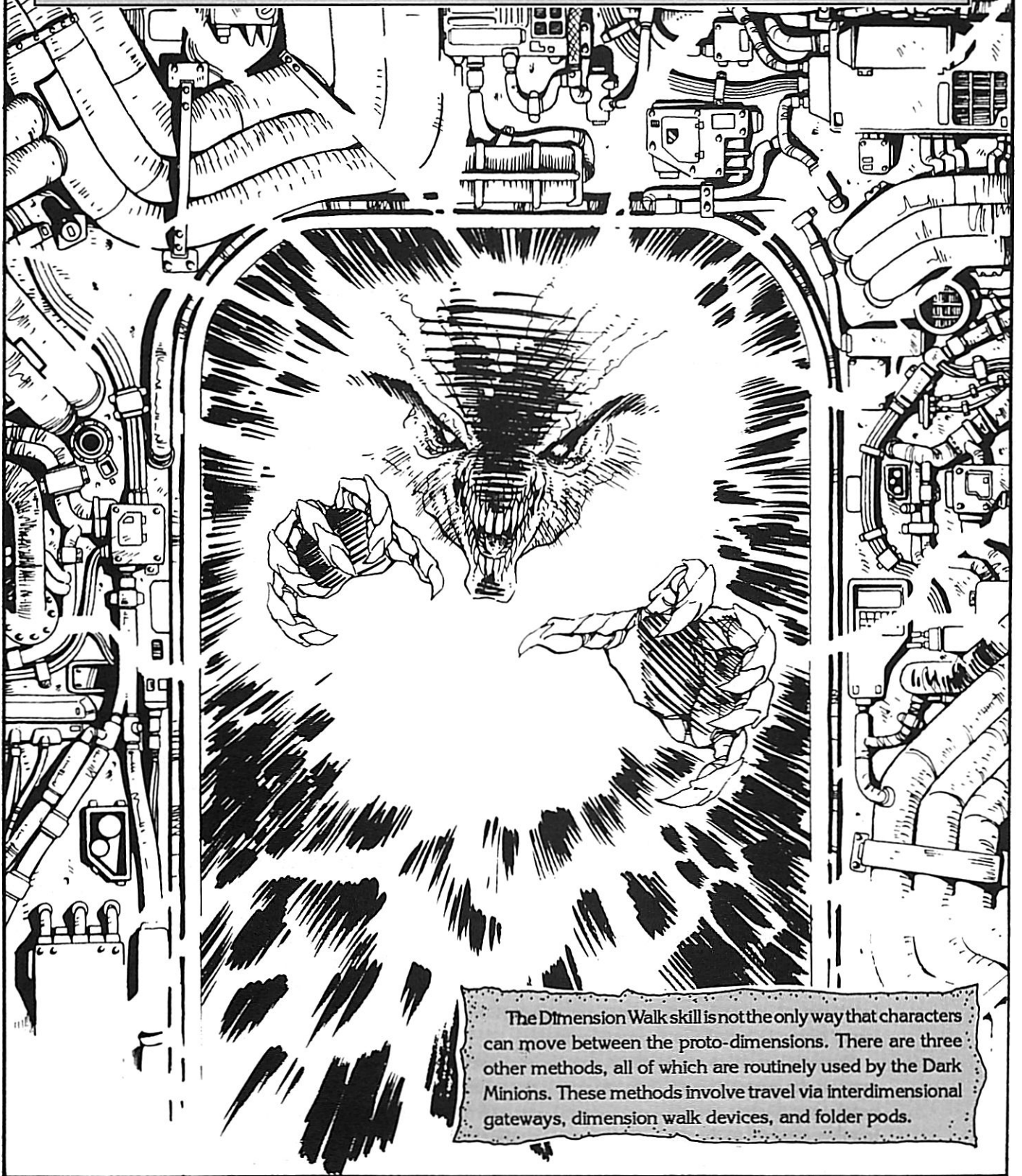
Dimensional Scan

Empaths with the Dimension Walk skill can try to see where another dimension walker has gone to. To do this, they must be within eight meters of the point where their quarry's portal was opened. Then, with a little concentration, they may be able to gain some feel for the proto-dimension which their quarry went to by empathically examining the micro-portal (see "Weakening the Interdimensional Fabric," page 36). The task is Easy if attempted within one minute after the portal closed, but becomes one level more difficult with each passing minute. After six minutes have passed, no dimension walker with human level skills can get an accurate impression of their quarry's destination.

Basic success will reveal what proto-dimension the scanner's quarry has gone to. Outstanding Success will also allow the scanner to know if skew or offset movement was utilized.

Scanners who have never visited the proto-dimension to which their quarry has escaped will get a feel for the proto-dimension but will, of course, not know its name, nor will they be able to travel there based on that brief contact. If, in the future, they go to that proto-dimension, they may (if they succeed at an Average: Intelligence task) realize that they are in the proto-dimension which they had scanned.

INTERDIMENSIONAL DEVICES



The Dimension Walk skill is not the only way that characters can move between the proto-dimensions. There are three other methods, all of which are routinely used by the Dark Minions. These methods involve travel via interdimensional gateways, dimension walk devices, and folder pods.



INTERDIMENSIONAL GATEWAYS

The easiest and most powerful method of trans-dimensional travel is through the use of an interdimensional gateway (sometimes called a gate for short). To use a gateway, an individual simply steps through the entrance at one end, and, in a single combat phase, is whisked off to the other side of the gateway. Once a gate has been built, the discontinuities of the dimensions involved do not matter. Empaths and non-empaths alike may use them. No task roll of any kind is required—gates function automatically. Likewise, since there is no task roll, users need not fear detection by the Darklings.

A gate works by directly connecting two dimensional anchors with a portal (a trans-dimensional tunnel identical to that created by empaths for interdimensional travel). Because of these anchors, it is possible to build a gate which will allow incredibly skewed interdimensional movement. In fact, it is possible to build a gate which connects one point in a proto-dimension to another in the same proto-dimension, a feat which the most powerful dimension walkers, human or Darkling, cannot accomplish.

In appearance, gates look very much like empathically created portals (see "Portals: Some Descriptive Mechanics," page 33), the main difference being that a gateway's entrance is surrounded by its associated anchor.

Building a Gateway: Constructing an interdimensional gate requires a great deal of time, effort, and energy. For this reason, their construction is usually limited to very powerful Darklings (usually only the Dark Lords and Dark Masters). Humans occasionally build or attempt to repair gates, but more often, however, humans destroy gates.

The first step required for the construction of a gateway is the installation of a dimensional anchor (see below) at each of the points which the gate is to connect. This means that Dark Lords wishing to construct a gate must be able to access each of the locations, or have servants, either minions or human Igors, who can install the anchors for them.

Once the anchors are in place, the portal must be opened. An empath who is trying to do this must stand before one anchor (within eight meters) and attempt to open a portal to the other. This is very similar to a normal Dimension Walk task (and counts as "Dimen-

sion Walk to Another Proto-Dimension" for purposes of detection), but because of the presence of the anchors, many of the normal limitations do not apply.

To determine the difficulty of this Dimension Walk task, compute the difference between the two proto-dimensions' discontinuities, and consult the Open Gate Task Difficulty Table. If the gate is going to connect two points in the same proto-dimension, the task is always of Impossible difficulty. The difference between the discontinuity of the target proto-dimension and the home proto-dimension of the empath who is attempting to open the gate does not matter for this task.

Open Gate Task Difficulty Table

<i>Discontinuity Difference</i>	<i>Difficulty Level</i>
0	Easy
1	Average
2	Difficult
3	Formidable
4	Impossible

Stress, as with other Dimension Walk tasks, affects the difficulty of this task. Attempting to open a gate in a totally secure situation is one level easier; doing it in a stressful situation increases its difficulty by one or more levels. If one of the anchors is set in Demonground, treat it as if it were in a proto-dimension with a discontinuity of 1 when calculating the difficulty of opening the portal.

Even if the die roll indicates success, the task still requires an incredible amount of raw power. A Stage Six success is usually required to open a permanent gate, but if the far anchor is somehow energized, opening the gate will be easier. Applying 10,000 watts of electricity to the far anchor reduces the requirement to a Stage Five Dimension Walk success. The amount of power must be increased by a factor of 10 to further reduce the required stages of success. With the application of 100 million watts (10,000 watts $\times 10 \times 10 \times 10$), all that is required is a Basic Success with Dimension Walk, but bear in mind that this is as much power as a small city uses. Electricity is not the only means of energizing an anchor but, in most cases, it is the most convenient source of such vast quantities of raw power.

If the task is successful but the stage of success is insufficient to open the gate, or the task results in



simple failure, then nothing happens. Opening a gate is empathically draining, however, and an empath who fails such an attempt must wait a while to recover from the failed attempt. Characters who failed the task must wait 45 minutes before they may try again. Characters who succeeded at the task but did not get the necessary stage of success should subtract their power level from the power level that was required and wait that many minutes before trying again. If a Catastrophic Failure is rolled during an attempt to open a gate, the far dimensional anchor is ruined and must be replaced before another attempt to open the gate is possible.

So, for example, if Roman is trying to open a gate and needs a Stage Five success and only ends up with a power level of 26 (a Stage Three success), he must wait 11 minutes (37, the minimum power level for a Stage Five success, minus 26, Roman's power level).

After a gate has been opened, very little energy is required to sustain it. This energy can come from virtually any source in advanced gates. The gate on Io, which the ETs unwittingly unsealed in 1983, is powered by the fusion disrupter drill which they used to uncover it. A gate which leads from Mechanica to Gehenna uses the heat of Gehenna as an energy source (for a dark elf example, see the Dead-Man's Curve sidebar, page 50).

After a gate is opened, two more task rolls must be made to set the type and quantity of dampening metal required to seal the gate (see below). The relative scarcity of the dampening metal and the quantity required determine how easy it is to seal a gateway. Both of these tasks may only be attempted once for a given gateway. Interrupted or aborted attempts count as failures.

Setting the Dampening Metal for a Gateway

To set the dampening metal is a Formidable: Dimension Walk task. Failure means that the dampening metal is sodium. The power level determines specific metal required.

For this purpose, the power level formula is as follows:

$$\text{Power Level} = \text{Empath's EMP Attribute} + \text{Dimension Walk Skill Level} + 1\text{D}10 - (\text{DD})^2$$



In this formula, DD is the difference between the discontinuity levels of the two connected proto-dimensions. After determining the power level of the task, apply the result to the following table:

Dampening Metal

Power Level	Metal
17 or less	Sodium
18-36	Iron
37-54	Silver
55-71	Gold
72-88	Platinum
88-104	Lanthanum
104-120	Radium
120-136	Polonium
136-152	Uranium
152+	Plutonium

The material from which the anchor is constructed can effect the type of dampening metal a gateway requires. Anchors constructed primarily of iron increase the metal by one (sodium becomes iron, silver becomes gold, and so on). Anchors constructed primarily of silver or gold increase the metal by two levels (sodium becomes silver, iron becomes gold, etc.). No other anchor construction materials can change the dampening metal. Both anchors must be built of the same material.



For example, Reynard and associates have successfully constructed a gateway, and now wish to set the highest possible dampening metal. Reynard first attempts to set the rarest possible metal: Reynard's Empathy attribute is 4 and his Dimension Walk skill is 3 so his asset is 7 (3+4). The gateway goes from Earth (discontinuity 0) to Slide (discontinuity 2), making the difference in discontinuities 2. The referee rolls a 7, and plugs the numbers into the power level formula:

$$\text{Power Level} = 7 + 7 - 2^2 = 7 + 7 + 4 = 18$$

A result of 18 on the Dampening Metal Table would ordinarily mean that the gate is dampened by iron. However, since Reynard and his associates have constructed the two anchors primarily of rolled iron structural members, the metal is silver instead.

Setting the Required Quantity of Dampening Metal

To set quantity of metal required for dampening a gate is a Dimension Walk task. The difficulty level of this task is as noted on the Quantity of Pure Dampening Metal table, below. The result of a failure is also noted.

Next, Reynard attempts to set the quantity of iron at 2.5 kilograms by attempting a Difficult Dimension Walk task. Reynard's asset is 7 (3+4) and his target number for a Difficult task attempt is $7 + 2 = 3.5$, which rounds down to 3. The roll is an 11, which is a failure, meaning that the gate is dampened by 200 grams of silver (6.4 troy ounces).

Dimensional Anchors

A dimensional anchor (less commonly known as a physical portal) is a complicated device that acts as the entry point for an interdimensional gateway. One anchor is required at each end of an interdimensional portal. Human-built anchors always look like doorways smothered in electrical wiring and electronics. Darkling dimensional anchors take many different forms. Some look like the ancient stonework found throughout the world: the trilithon (three-stone) megaliths in Europe, stone temples and monuments in Egypt and Central America, or even *Moai*, the stone heads of Easter Island. Others resemble more mundane objects (picture frames, windows, doors, arbors, mirrors, signposts, and tombstones, for example). Still others have the sinister look of DarkTek. There is no common type or size of dimensional anchor; they all seem to be custom built. Whether this is a result of the Dark Ones trying to camouflage their gates or is a reflection of their creator's personalities is unknown.

Most dimensional anchors have a door/window/archway aspect about them, but some appear as solid objects and have an intangible doorway built into them at some point. Occasionally, there may even be a conventional doorway or other entrance that needs to be opened, unlocked, or moved aside before the anchor can be entered. The size of the opening is effectively unlimited, but few anchors will permit the passage of objects for more than three meters wide or high, and most are the size of a conventional human doorway. Obviously, the limiting factor in what can pass through a gate is the size of the anchor.

Building a Dimensional Anchor:

It is possible for a human using only electronic components (no DarkTek) to build a dimensional anchor. Completing this task requires a great understanding of the proto-dimensions and electronic engineering. Any individual who wants to build a dimensional anchor must spend three hours at the proposed location for the anchor, taking electronic readings

Quantity of Pure Dampening Metal

Metal	Impossible	Formidable	Difficult	Easy	Failure
Sodium	30kg	3kg	300g	30g	3g
Iron	25kg	2.5kg	250g	25g	2.5g
Silver	20kg	2kg	200g	20g	2g
Gold	10kg	1kg	100g	10g	1g
Platinum	5kg	500g	50g	5g	0.5g
Lanthanum	5kg	500g	50g	5g	0.5g
Radium	1kg	100g	10g	1g	0.1g
Polonium	1kg	100g	10g	1g	0.1g
Uranium	1kg	100g	10g	1g	0.1g
Plutonium	1kg	100g	10g	1g	0.1g



and measurements, and a month analyzing the results (each anchor must be specially attuned to its locale and to its partner). If an anchor is to replace a destroyed one, the builder must also spend an additional three hours studying the existing anchor it is to be paired with.

At the end of the month, make an Impossible: Physics task roll. If the roll is a failure, another month must be spent doing research before another roll may be attempted. If, on the other hand, the Physics task roll is successful, the individual may attempt to build a dimensional anchor. This task takes a week and requires success at a Difficult: Electronics task. The components required to build an electronic dimensional anchor will cost $\$30,000 \times (1D6+2)$, availability code R/S. The anchor produced will not be as strong as a Darkling-built anchor (see "Destroying/Disconnecting an Anchor," below). Having access to an existing anchor for study makes each of these task rolls one level easier but does not reduce the amount of time it takes to perform any of the tasks. Such a human-built anchor weighs 100 kilograms, and looks like a conventional doorframe covered in wires, and electronic components, connected to a large black box filled with more electronic components. Anchors may be moved once built (through gateways, if necessary), but may not be moved after activation without destroying their utility. Once an anchor has been activated (once its gateway has been opened), that anchor cannot be disconnected and reused in another gate (in other words, there is no such thing as a "used" anchor). This entire procedure (including the measurements and the month of study) must be gone through for each pair of anchors produced.

Electronic anchors are the only type humans are capable of building. Note that anchors built by Darklings need not be electronic, but may incorporate electronic, DarkTek, and/or completely unfathomable components. Human- and Darkling-built anchors may be used in the same gateway without difficulty (if, for example, a group of humans installed a new anchor to repair a damaged gateway).

Power Requirements: The power requirement discussed here is to maintain an anchor once created (the power needed to open a gateway is discussed above). Power requirements to maintain human-built anchors are up to the referee, but they must ultimately be



electrical in nature. Each human-built anchor requires a separate power source. Referees should set a kilowatt requirement in the 500 to 10,000 range (or roll $1D20 \times 500$ kilowatts) for each anchor, but bear in mind that the only generator included in the basic rules is the 600-kilowatt portable model used with the Armington heavy laser, described on page 295 of *Dark Conspiracy* (several portable generators are listed in *Twilight: 2000*, for referees who own that book). The simplest thing is to simply plug the anchor into the municipal power supply, but anchors are not always located convenient to an electric socket. Requiring the players to devise power sources of their own (geothermal, solar, etc.) is good exercise for them.

Destroying/Disconnecting an Anchor: Destroying an anchor or disconnecting it from its power supply renders a gate unusable (see "Destroying a Gateway," below).

Most Darkling-manufactured dimensional anchors are equivalent in strength (but not in shape) to a half-meter cube of reinforced concrete and thus require about 128 damage points (DPs) of untamped or 32 DPs of tamped explosives to be destroyed. Some



anchors are far stronger than this—the gateway on Io could probably survive a direct hit with a tactical nuclear weapon. The more important a gateway is, the stronger its anchors will be, and the more difficult they will be to disconnect. Human-built anchors are half as strong as Darkling-built ones, i.e., they require 64 DPs of untamped or 16 DPs of tamped explosives to be destroyed.

If an anchor can be disconnected from its power supply, that will render the gateway unusable until power is restored. The difficulty level for this action and the skills involved should be decided by the referee. Discovering a power source for human-built anchors should generally be an Average: Electronics task. Discovering a Darkling power source involves working out the function of the various moist lumps, pulsing tendrils, and gelatinous blobs of a DarkTek anchor, and should generally be a Formidable or Impossible task (referee's option) versus either Observation or Intelligence. Failure can mean that the PCs misidentify something organic but innocuous (such as grapevines) as the power supply, or that the PCs fail to locate a back-up power connection. The referee may wish to require several task rolls in order for the PCs to acquire the full picture (one to locate the power connections, one to determine how to disconnect them, one to

succeed at disconnecting them, and so on). For Darkling anchors, it should usually be quicker and easier to just blow the thing up.

Destroying a Gateway

Gateways require a considerable investment of time and empathic power to create, and are quite vulnerable if unprotected. Because of this, the Darklings usually do not leave their gateways unprotected. One or both of the dimensional anchors will be armored or fortified. The entrance may be inside a secure structure, or guarded by some powerful minion or beastie.

Once the PCs arrive at the gateway and deal with whatever security precautions have been taken, they can get on with its destruction. There are two main ways to destroy an gateway: destruction/disconnection, and empathic closure.

Destruction/Disconnection: The first method involves the destruction or disconnection of both of the gateway's dimensional anchors. When this occurs, the gateway becomes unstable and, like the portals created by dimension walkers, will collapse after the passage of time. Even without their anchors, however, gateways are equivalent to a dimension walker's portal on which six stages of success were spent on duration. This, coupled with the fact that gateways are usually only made by very powerful empaths, means that, even without its anchors, the gate could remain functional for as long as a day after both of its anchors are destroyed or disconnected.

If only one anchor is destroyed or disconnected from its power supply, the gateway cannot be used, but the portal remains in existence (connected to the intact anchor). If the destroyed anchor is replaced by a new anchor, or power is restored, the gateway will become fully functional again (the new anchor must be installed at the same location as the old one). Both human- and Darkling-built anchors can be used in the same gateway.

Simply disconnecting an anchor does not guarantee its destruction. A back-up power supply may exist which the PCs have not discovered, or the owners/current users of the gateway may return and reconnect it before collapse occurs. The PCs must guard both ends of the gateway until the gateway collapses in order to be certain of the gate's destruction.

Empathic Closure: The second method of de-

Dead-Man's Curve

As an example of the unique power supplies used in maintaining Darkling anchors, consider the following: A gate constructed by a group of dark elves in the mountains near Pittshio is located at the base of a steep valley wall. Halfway up the valley is a twisting hairpin curve known to the locals as Dead-Man's Curve due to the large number of accidents there. The anchor of the gate is powered by the death agony of automobile drivers that take the curve at too high a speed and leave the road to roll down the hillside into a small pond. Whenever the anchor's "battery" needs recharging (three or four times a year), the dark elves will replace the real speed limit sign with a fake indicating a higher safe speed and await results. (The sign is replaced after the accident to prevent law enforcement authorities from becoming suspicious.) Another method is for a disguised dark elf to encourage young sports car or motorcycle drivers to race along that particular stretch of road as a test of their *machismo*. A bucket or two of nearly frictionless mud from Slide is sometimes administered to help matters along.



stroying a gateway is a two-step process which uses empathic skill as the second component. First, one of the anchors must be destroyed/disconnected (as noted above). Next, an empath must approach to within eight meters of the gate's anchor and achieve a Stage Six success at a Difficult: Dimension Walk task. This pushes the other end of the interdimensional portal into the interstices. Sorcerers, with their specialized Close Portal skill, can complete this task with only a Stage Five success (but the anchor must still be dealt with first).

Because of the dangers discussed below, closing a gateway is, at best, a Difficult task (the empath attempting it has lots of distractions).

Dangers of Collapsing Gateways: While closing an empath's portal presents no particular danger, a collapsing gateway is a different matter. Once the portal has been expelled, the gateway will go dead and the hole in the interdimensional fabric will start to close, in much the same way as the portals made by dimension walkers.

Any individual within eight meters of the gate must make a Difficult: Dimension Walk test to avoid being sucked into the portal. Simple failure means that the empath has been pulled into the gate and transported to the other end. Catastrophic Failure deposits the unfortunate empath in the Interstices. It is possible for an empath to be transported to the other entrance, and then suffer damage from the explosive collapse of the gateway, discussed in the next paragraph.

A collapsing gateway also releases a great deal of energy, unlike the collapse of a dimension walker's portal. The majority of this energy is bled off harmlessly into the interstices, but a percentage of it will be released out the open end (the end with the intact and functioning anchor) with explosive force 1D10 rounds after the collapse. If both gates are destroyed or disconnected simultaneously, the explosive force of the collapsing gateway will be completely vented into the interstices.

If the PCs are near the gateway when it collapses, the referee will need to know how severe the explosion is. This energy release is based on the stress which the portal was under and the resulting explosive force can be determined with the following formulas:

C is concussion, B is burst, and D is equal to the difference between the discontinuity of the proto-dimensions which the gate connected. The only exception to this is in those cases where a gate connects two points in the same proto-dimension. In this case, assume that D is equal to 5.

For example, if Roman destroyed an inter-dimensional gate in Slide (which has a discontinuity of 2) which led to Earth (with a discontinuity of 0), there would be an explosion. D would be equal to $2-0$, or 2. Concussion from the explosion would be $5 \times (1+2)$, or 15, burst would be $15 \times (1+2)$, or 45 (damage inflicted by explosions is covered in **Dark Conspiracy**, on pages 98-99). The referee rolls a 6, indicating that whatever happens to be on the other end of the portal has six phases (30 seconds) to get out of range. We will assume Roman passes his Dimension Walk task, and avoids being sucked into the collapsing gateway, otherwise he would also risk being caught in the explosion.

Sealing a Gateway

There are those circumstances where characters will be unable to destroy/disconnect a gate, or will have a reason to preserve it. In these cases, it is possible to seal the gate, rendering it useless until the seal is removed. There are several means by which this can be accomplished.

Blockage: Although it does not permanently seal it, a gateway can be physically blocked with tons of concrete, rubble, scrap metal, or other material. This does not prevent the gate from operating, but it does effectively prevent anything from coming out until the blockage is cleared. If the PCs simply dynamite a building down upon the gateway entrance, it will pile up around it, but any of the rubble that falls through the entrance itself will be transmitted. There will almost always be a small cavity on the blocked side, sometimes enough to accommodate a human-sized being, sometimes not, but almost always large enough to permit something to be transmitted.

Whatever happens, the forces on the other side of the gateway will eventually be able to tunnel their way through whatever debris is laid in their path.

If more subtlety is used, and something like a steel plate or a brick wall is erected almost touching the entrance, only the smallest of spaces will be left. Rubble or concrete can then be piled against the



barrier, and the gate sealed for a slightly longer time. In the case of most Darklings, however, physically blocking a gateway will do little more than slow them down. In the case of the more powerful Darklings, especially the Dark Lords, it will probably not even accomplish that.

Distorter: The easiest way that a gate may be sealed is by installing a distorter near one of its anchors. The distorter effectively hides the two ends of the gate from each other making it impossible for anything to pass through the gate. Of course, the effects of a distorter are not permanent either. Eventually, its power source will run down, one of its internal components will wear out, or the users of the gate will send a party to deal with it. It is not possible to tell the difference between a gate sealed by a distorter and a dampened gate from the other end.

Dampening: The best way in which a gate's function can be interrupted is by physically blocking the entrance, and then using a dampening metal to interfere with the field around the blocked dimensional anchor. The combination of physical blockage and

dampening prevent the gate from being unblocked from the other end, and the dampening metal requires no power source.

To determine which metal is needed, careful measurements of the field distortion caused by various sample metals must be made next to one of the gate's dimensional anchors. The equipment required to make such measurements can be acquired from electronics supply companies and will cost about \$400 (S/C). Samples of the likely metals can be collected for \$200 (C/V). After an hour of these measurements, an Average: Physics task roll must be made. If the roll is successful, the PC will know what type of metal is required to dampen the particular field, and will know the quantity required. If the roll is a failure, the metal will be known, but the quantity required will be incorrect. If the roll is a Catastrophic Failure then the PC will determine a metal and quantity that is incorrect (referees should roll for this task themselves to preserve uncertainty). The referee should determine the dampening metal for a particular gate based on who (or what) created it and where it leads (referees should the tables concerning this process for hints).

Mystics and sorcerers can discover which metal is needed by spending two hours next to the anchor contemplating the auras created by samples of various metals (no electronics needed). At the end of that time, make an Average: Dimension Walk roll. Success and failure are as above.

Once the dampening metal has been discovered, the PCs must physically block the gate with something substantial that completely seals it. This can be anything from panel fashioned from solid oak planks to a single piece of sheet steel. It must seal the opening completely, which means that the builders of the seal must fabricate it exactly to match the dimensions of the entrance, to the millimeter. Second, the required amount (or more) of the dampening metal must be built into the seal somehow. For a gate sealed by 25 grams of iron, simply bolting the oak planks together with iron stove bolts would suffice, or sealing the opening with concrete and steel reinforcing rods. For a gate sealed by gold, a sandwich of wooden planks and gold foil would do the trick.

The purity of the metal is unimportant. For example, a sodium-dampened gate that requires three



kilograms could be blocked by building three kilograms of pure sodium metal (pretty nasty stuff, by the way) or 7.5 kilograms of table salt into the seal. Table salt is sodium chloride, a molecule made up sodium and chlorine atoms. Only 40% of the weight of sodium chloride is sodium atoms, so three kilograms of salt would contain 1.2 kilograms of sodium (and 1.8 kilograms of chlorine). To determine how much salt is required, multiply the weight of sodium by 2.5 (0.4: 1 = 1.0: 2.5). The weight of metal in other compounds can be determined by consulting a chemistry book and working out the relative molecular weights. The salt could be placed in small holes drilled into the oak planks and held in place with wax or cork plugs or a wood/salt sandwich could be fabricated.

After this has been accomplished, any empath can administer the final touch by making an Impossible: Dimension Walk task (sorcerers can accomplish this with a Formidable: Close Portal task). If successful, the gate is not only sealed, the blocked entrance (seal and all) vanishes without a trace, and the anchor goes dormant (consuming no power). If the anchor had an actual physical opening, that opening remains. If the opening was part of the gateway, it vanishes, and is replaced by solid stone, concrete, or whatever.

The other anchor still exists (the entryway turned solid black), but the gate cannot be used, and (more importantly) the sealed anchor cannot be unsealed until the anchor is brought back into physical existence. Where does the "vanished" anchor go? No one knows—no "lost anchor proto-dimension" has ever been discovered. Record the stage of success of this sealing task, for use in the inevitable unblocking attempts.

Merely placing the dampening metal in close proximity to the anchor will not seal the gate. The dampening metal must be used in concert with the complete physical blockage in order to seal the gate.

Interrupter: There is a DarkTek device called an interrupter which can be used to seal (and ultimately destroy) a gateway. These devices are spherical, a little smaller than a basketball, and are covered with light blue, translucent scales. If one is brought into the presence of a gate, it will begin to pulse and flex. If it is tossed into a gateway, thin vine-like tendrils will rapidly snake out from between the scales and begin

to wrap themselves around the anchor. At the same time, other tendrils will reach through the gateway and envelop the other dimensional anchor. Within six combat phases (30 seconds), the entire gateway will be overgrown by the interrupter's tendrils, which will harden and render it unusable.

The interrupter will then proceed to feed on the empathic energies within the two dimensional anchors. After a period of time (50+5D10 days), the two anchors will be completely drained and the gateway will collapse. The interrupter will then fall into the interstices.

Removing an interrupter is a tricky job. Each side of a gateway will be overgrown with 50 hits worth of tendrils which have an armor value of 1. All of the tendrils on both sides of the gateway must be either cut away with melee attacks or destroyed with explosives (shooting them does little good, and they do not seem at all effected by heat) to restore it to working order. If one side is cleared but the other is not, the tendrils which were destroyed will regrow at the rate of one hit per hour. What this means is that to effectively remove an interrupter, it must be attacked from both sides simultaneously.

Interrupters do have offensive capabilities. When an active interrupter (one which has been placed in a gate) is attacked, its tendrils will become mobile again, and it will attempt to grab its assailant (skill 6). If it succeeds, it will begin to drain Empathy, and then Intelligence from its target at the rate of 1 point per phase. When a victim's Intelligence reaches 0 that victim will die. Empathy and Intelligence which have been drained by a interrupter will return at 1 point per hour until the victim is back to normal. It is a Difficult: Strength task to tear free (or pull someone free) from an interrupter.

Needless to say, it is impossible to carry an interrupter through a gateway.

Other Means: Referees may create other means of sealing and destroying gateways as they see fit. These can be DarkTek, advanced human devices, or proto-dimensional artifacts (the gateway controller device used in *Nightsider* to seal the proto-dimension called Off-Ramp is an example of the latter).

Unblocking a Gate: Digging out a blockage can be accomplished from the other side of the gate. A distorter or a simple dampening seal can be easily



removed by anyone on the side of the gate on which it was installed. Darklings who find their pathways blocked in this way will, if they can, send agents to remove whatever is sealing the gateway in question. Because of this, minion hunters whose plans hinge on a seal remaining functional would be well advised to leave a rear guard to protect it from an almost inevitable attack.

Blocking a gate with a dampened seal in combination with a Dimension Walk or Close Portal task requires that the anchor be brought back into existence with an Impossible: Dimension Walk task (Formidable: Open Portal for sorcerers) that achieves a stage of success greater than the stage of success of the empath who sealed the gate. This task must be attempted on the same side of the gate as the seal.

DIMENSION WALK DEVICES

Dimension walk devices are described in *Dark Conspiracy* on pages 234-235. This essay presents a more detailed version of their operation. The PCs, of course, must discover all of this for themselves.

The dimension walk device is one of the most innocuous-looking pieces of DarkTek. It usually appears to be a glossy black cube with perfectly square corners. At some angles, though, it looks somehow wrong, as if it were turning and sitting still at the same time.

Most humans find it difficult to keep their eyes focused on a dimension walk device, and will suffer a slight sense of vertigo if they spend more than a few seconds looking at it. The disorientation is minor and goes away quickly, so it has no effect on combat or other task rolls. The devices do not seem to affect

those who are observing them from close up (less than two meters or so).

Close observation of a dimension walk device reveals points of light within the cube: darting about, changing hues, pulsing, and fading. Imaginative individuals might think of a smoked glass fish tank containing dozens of brilliantly colored, geometrically shaped tropical fish. PCs who touch it find that it feels slick but not oily, somewhat reminiscent of a snake's skin.

Those who touch a dimension walk device might notice that the lights tend to move toward their hand. If they are brave enough to leave their hand on it for a full 30 seconds, the lights will form a geometric pattern beneath it. This is the device's control panel.

Working the dimension walk device is similar to using "point and click" software with a computer mouse. The lights can be moved into various patterns by dragging them along with a fingertip and made to change color by gently pressing them. Once the user ceases to touch the cube it sits, unmoving, for six combat phases (30 seconds). This delay is built into the device to allow its users to change their commands, but, of course, the PCs will not know this. If the device is not touched during the delay, it will project a transfer field. If it is touched, the cycle begins again.

After transmitting material, the device retains the pattern for six combat phases (30 seconds) before the points of light begin random motion again.

Patterns: The device can send PCs to any proto-dimension which they know the coded pattern for—there need not be a device at the receiving end. Entering a pattern at random is very dangerous—there are millions of proto-dimensions, and most of them are deadly to humans.

It is possible to learn patterns by watching others use the device. PCs who are attempting to use a pattern which they have recently seen in use must succeed at an Average: Intelligence task to enter it correctly. If more than an hour has passed since they saw the pattern, entering it correctly becomes a Difficult: Intelligence task. Attempting to enter a pattern using a videotape or photograph as reference is one level easier. The PCs must make their own judgments about the safety of the proto-dimension accessed by a pattern obtained by observation. Unprotected humans stepping through a device can be assumed to be going somewhere that is not immediately deadly.

Finding a Hidden Gate

Empaths can locate a sealed and vanished gateway by succeeding at a Dimension Walk task. The difficulty level depends upon how close they are to the gate when they make the attempt (all other things being equal). Locating a sealed and vanished gate within eight meters is Easy. The task becomes one level more difficult for each eight meters added to the distance (0-8 = Easy, 9-16 = Average, 17-32 = Difficult, and so on).

For sorcerers, this task is one level easier. For all empaths, this task counts as "Dimension Walk in the Same Proto-Dimension" for purposes of detection by Darklings.



Entering the pattern takes a full combat phase (five seconds). This means that from the time a character can first touch the device to the time the device will begin to project its field is three combat phases (15 seconds). If a group of adventurers intend to use a dimension walk device to escape from pursuers, they will need plenty of time to summon the control panel, enter the code and wait for the field to come up.

Transfer Field: The field which a dimension walk device projects is always in the form of a cube and is always twice the size of the device from which it is projected. The field is a misty, tangible-looking darkness which swallows the device that is projecting it. It is not possible to see what is on the other side.

Characters who enter the field will discover that the dimension walk device is no longer there, as if it has transmitted itself. When the field collapses, the device reappears, sitting exactly where it was before it was swallowed up by the transfer field.

The amount of time the transfer field stays up seems to be directly related to the size of the cube from which it is projected. The field usually lasts for two combat phases (10 seconds) plus one combat phase (five seconds) for every meter the device is tall (not the height of the field). The most common device is one meter in height, and would remain open for three combat phases (15 seconds).

The device will only transmit an item which is fully enveloped by the field. If part of an object sticks out, even just by a fraction of a centimeter, it will not be transmitted. The instant it is moved entirely within the transfer field, projection will occur. This means that if a character has a part of a jacket sleeve, the barrel of a rifle, or even a few hairs sticking out of the field, that individual will not be transferred. Usually this is not a problem for humans who can squat down, move an arm, or do whatever contortions they must. Moving a car, which is probably five meters long or more, is all but impossible with a one-meter dimension walk device. The car could be taken apart, its pieces stacked within the device's field, and then re-assembled in whatever proto-dimension it ended up, but this is not practical in most cases.

The device is not very bright and has some difficulty discerning what constitutes a single transferable item. If a PC was dragging a length of rope

into a dimension walk device's field, for example, the device would not transfer the character until the rope was dropped or pulled entirely within the field. The device's makers designed it this way as a sort of safety feature. Even the most powerful Darklings do not want to leave limbs or the tops of their heads behind. Anything not transmitted when the field collapses remains where it is.

Dimension walk devices can function in two different modes. The first mode is a relay function in which it sends its cargo to another dimension walk device (but does not activate the second device). While there appears to be a maximum and minimum range for transfers within a single proto-dimension, the device seems fully capable of transmitting to any dimension walk device in any other dimension.

The second mode transmits the user to the exact corresponding point in whatever proto-dimension the device is set to transmit to. Skewed interdimensional travel is not possible in this second mode. What this means is if a group of PCs use the same pattern that they just witnessed a group of ETs using, then they will be transported to the same place at which the ETs arrived.

The most common size of dimension walk device is about one-meter tall. Two other sizes are regularly found: a three-meter device which is capable of transporting a mid-sized car, and a seven-meter model which can handle most heavy equipment in its 14-meter field. There are some rumors of really *big* dimension walk devices, as large as 50 meters tall with a transfer field that is larger than a football field, but most minion hunters scoff at these rumors.

Destruction: Dimension walk devices have no armor. Inflicting more than 32 damage points on a dimension walk device damages it enough to render it inoperable; 128 damage points will destroy the device (firing a machinegun at the device will eventually destroy it; firing a TOW missile at it will destroy it more quickly). Remember, however, that if the PCs attach an explosive charge to a dimension walk device and then use the device for transportation to another proto-dimension, the demolition charge will also be transported.

Destroyed dimension walk devices crack open in several places, and release clouds of black gas which dissipates quickly. The colored shapes inside will dart out through the cracks, flutter in the air like butterflies for a few seconds and then flop to the



ground, evidently "dead." They will vanish completely within a few minutes.

FOLDER PODS

Folder pods (described in *DarkTek*, page 73; see also accompanying sidebar) are the most disgusting method of interdimensional travel, without a doubt. Folder pods are shaped roughly like a four-meter wide, dark-colored clam when closed, but more closely resemble a giant gullet when open. The interior of the pod is filled with dozens of veined and noded organs and organ-like structures along with a few projections which appear to be made of bone and cartilage. Bits of the interior pulse and undulate; others generate sounds which are reminiscent of a growling stomach. The smell of a pod is primarily musky with an undertone of decay and a faint suggestion of a sharp, acidic aroma.

Adventurers who are using a folder pod for the first time must succeed at an Average: Willpower skill (not asset) test or they will be unable to bring themselves to lay down in what looks like a giant digestive tract. After a few trips in a pod, no Willpower test is required.

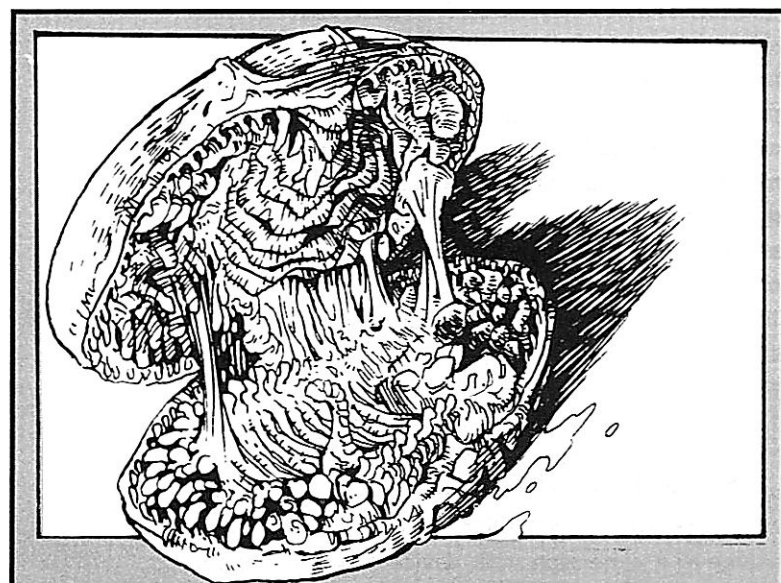
When the pod first closes, characters inside will experience perfect silence and perfect darkness, as if they are in a sensory-deprivation tank. After a while, they will begin to receive images of the world outside from the pod's sensory organs. Characters who are claustrophobic will not take this experience well and will automatically behave as if they have Catastrophically Failed a Willpower test. Until they are cured of their claustrophobia, they will be unable to voluntarily enter a folder pod again.

When the pod is given the command to open, the passengers will find themselves covered in a clear slime that tastes bitter and smell likes the pod. The slime will begin to evaporate almost immediately, and there will be almost no trace of it after about 15 minutes. However, dogs and other creatures with a keen sense of smell will react negatively toward the passengers until they have thoroughly washed themselves and their gear. The purpose of this ooze is unknown; some theorize that it is part of the pod's life-support system. It is interesting to note that this ooze will evaporate from a sealed container as readily as it does in open air.

Folder pods perform in exactly the same way as a human with the Dimension Walk ability (makes you wonder, doesn't it?). They have a Dimension Walk asset of 20 though, a far higher score than most human dimension walkers could ever dream of obtaining. This means that a folder pod can succeed at an Impossible: Dimension Walk task 25% of the time and will always have at least three stages of success to spend on accuracy, skewed movement, and so on. Folder pods may not be used to do interdimensional scanning or to close a gateway.

Commands must be given to a folder pod with the Project Thought empathic ability. Of course this requires that an empathic link be established with the pod. For this purpose Animal Empathy, Human Empathy, and Darkling Empathy will all work equally well. Commands that a folder pod will accept include orders to open and close, as well as to travel to any dimension which the folder pod "knows."

Folder pods can move under their own power by undulating portions of their flexible lower shell, but are slow and clumsy, and only move in response to commands or to maneuver in combat. They may not climb or descend stairs or ladders, and cannot cross obstructions more than 10 centimeters in



Folder Pod Statistics

# Appear: 1	Initiative: 4	Agility: 5
Attack: 2	Strength: 25	Skill/Dam.: 6/5D6
Move: 5/10/20	Constitution: 40	Hits: 50/100
Wt: 800 kg	Price: N/A (—/—)	User Cost: None.



height. This makes a folder pod less useful than most PCs would prefer. Since the pod weighs 800 kilograms and is four meters long by three meters wide, a flatbed truck—something not readily available in most proto-dimensions—is the most utilitarian method of moving the pod.

Folder pods can also be “taught” new proto-dimensions by any empath who has been there, even if the empath does not have the Dimension Walk skill. This is an Average: Project Thought task and will require a few minutes to properly accomplish. Empaths cannot learn about proto-dimensions from a folder pod, but they can instruct the pod to take them to these proto-dimensions so that they can learn about them for themselves.

It is possible to give a folder pod a series of conditional commands. For example, a pod might be ordered to “Travel to Gray, wait for 10 minutes and then return to this proto-dimension at this spot,” by an empath who was about to attack a Darkling base and wanted his ride to be waiting when it was time to flee.

Of course, any order given to a folder pod is subject to the limitations of the Dimension Walk skill. In the example above, the folder pod might return to this dimension 100 meters away from the destination at which it was ordered to arrive.

In addition to travel, Darklings, especially ETs, often use folder pods as a sort of missile. A folder pod could be loaded with a payload of rabid animals and instructed to travel to the center of a prole settlement camp where it would release its unwholesome cargo. Just as easily, it could be loaded with a few ravagers and sent to the meeting place of a team of minion hunters. The ETs sometimes hide slaughterbots among the pod’s various organs.

If a folder pod is attacked, it will open and lash out with a sinuous, noded stalk with sharp, bone-like tip, and move defensively to escape. If the attacks continue and the pod is near death, it will leave the dimension it is in in order to save itself.

Folder pods contain an organ which functions exactly like an empathic beacon. This organ constantly projects a “homing signal” into the astral proto-dimension which can only be detected by means of a Psychic Tracking task attempted by someone (or something) familiar with the pod’s specific “frequency” (see *Empathic Sourcebook*, pages 93-94 for details).

Attempts to “disconnect” this organ will be interpreted as attacks by the pod, and will be met with defensive actions as noted above. Any mystic who has travelled in a pod at least once is familiar enough with that pod’s “frequency” to be able to track it.

The Dark Ones will go to extreme lengths to recover a folder pod which has been captured by humans. It is important to remember that with the possibility of conditional programming, humans can never quite be sure whether they have actually captured a folder pod or if it may have captured them.

Sensing Other Means of Dimensional Travel

Empaths can sense the operation of other means of dimensional travel under certain conditions.

Gateways: Opening a gateway creates a “noise” similar to the one created by empathically opening a portal (see *Sensing a Portal*, page 44). Once a gateway has been opened, however, it cannot be detected by empathic means with any reliability, although some highly advanced electronic devices can locate them (see the gateway detector on page 28 of *Nightsider*, for example).

An empath can determine where a gateway leads by standing within eight meters and succeeding at a Formidable: Dimension Scan task (see page 44). Success gives a mental image of the proto-dimension adequate for identification if the empath has been to that proto-dimension. It does not give enough of an impression of the proto-dimension to allow the empath to travel there. Failure produces inadequate information.

It is possible for non-empaths to walk through a gate and not realize what has happened to them, although as with empathically created portals, this happens only when the source and target proto-dimensions are almost identical and when the anchor is large or well camouflaged.

Dimension Walk Devices: Dimension walk devices cannot be detected empathically. They can be located by advanced electronic devices (such as the gateway detector mentioned above), but only for the instant the device is transporting. Such readings are fleeting, and will seldom be of much utility except in locating devices that are used frequently.

Folder Pods: The “empathic beacon” organ of a folder pod constantly projects a “homing signal” which can be detected by a Psychic Tracking task (see the “Folder Pod” entry, beginning on page 56).

USING PROTO-DIMENSIONS IN A CAMPAIGN



There are many decisions that referees must make regarding how they will choose to run the proto-dimensions in their individual campaigns. This chapter will discuss a few important points to consider.



before they introduce it into their campaigns. Players should probably have some knowledge of how the proto-dimensions that they know how to enter work.

The Everywhere Method

The first way in which the proto-dimensions could be run is called the everywhere method. The everywhere method assumes that every proto-dimension can be entered from every spot in every proto-dimension as well as any spot on the Earth. The only limiting factors are the discontinuity of the target dimension and the discontinuity of the emper's home dimension.

The advantage of this system is that it requires no extra work on the part of the referee. There are two weaknesses inherent in the everywhere method. First, it lacks flavor—especially if the players have read the *Proto-Dimension Sourcebook* and are familiar with the ins and outs of the meta-universe. Second, referees who use the everywhere method are surrendering a useful device for controlling the flow of events in a campaign.

In combination with one or more of the other methods, the everywhere method should only be used for the fragmentary proto-dimensions which sorcerers tap into in order to perform their special feats and for one or two average proto-dimensions that virtually all human and Darkling dimension walkers know about.

The Flowchart Method

Another method for refereeing the proto-dimensions is called the flowchart method. This method requires the referee to build a chart which shows how the proto-dimensions are connected. In a campaign using the flowchart method alone, only a handful of proto-dimensions could be reached from the Earth. Other proto-dimensions could only be entered by travelling through one of the proto-dimensions which was linked to Earth. Sometimes the connections work both ways, sometimes they are one-way links.

Consider the sample flowchart on page 61 (referees should, of course, devise their own, including whatever proto-dimensions they create, and revising it as they create new ones). If the PCs decide that they want to go to Gothic, they must first go to Hades. If, upon reaching Hades, they change their mind (oops), then they have a problem. The journey from Earth to

Hades is a one-way trip. They will have to go to the Plaguelands just to get back to Earth, or make their way back by a more roundabout route through Airborne, Gehenna, and the Plaguelands. Characters who want to go to Gray must travel through the Plaguelands on their trip out and again on their trip back. Voyagers to Pyre can go directly back to Earth.

In campaigns that use the flowchart method, referees should allow the construction of gates that ignore the flowchart's restrictions. Using the example flowchart mentioned above, a gate could be built which would connect Gray directly to the Earth or Tartarus to Hades, even though neither of those trips could be made with in a single dimension walk. This is, perhaps, why the powerful Dark Lords, who could dimension walk to any proto-dimension despite its discontinuity, would prefer to build gates. With a gate, they do not have to deal with the intervening proto-dimensions or chance entering the home proto-dimension of a rival Dark Lord.

When the PCs are sent to a random proto-dimension as the result of a Catastrophic Failure, referees should ignore their flowcharts. Likewise, if the PCs should end up in the interstices, which, by definition, are connected to each of the proto-dimensions, the proto-dimensions which they find should have nothing to do with the referee's flowchart.

The Limited Access Method

When correspondence was discussed earlier in this book, the fact that some proto-dimensions are much smaller than the Earth was not discussed. One way that this fact could be dealt with is to assume that in a dimension which is 1000 times smaller than the Earth distances are compressed and that a trip of one mile in the proto-dimension will correspond to a trip of 1000 miles on Earth. The problem with this is that it makes it too easy to pop into a proto-dimension, take a short walk, and pop back onto the other side of the Earth. Another way to handle such a case is to use limited access.

When using the limited access system to referee the proto-dimensions, it is assumed that a proto-dimension which is smaller than the Earth (or another proto-dimension) only corresponds to a small portion of the Earth's surface. The closet dimensions in which the Nosferatu were imprisoned in *Nightsider* work in



exactly this way. Those micronian proto-dimensions correspond to one small region on Earth in the recesses of a subterranean chamber.

For example, a referee could decide that Grey only corresponds to a small portion of North America, say the Southwest. Adventurers who want to travel to Grey must first go somewhere in the Southwest, perhaps Santa Fe or Tucson, before they can enter the proto-dimension.

The biggest advantage of limited access is that it gives referees a means of steering their players. If the characters wish to travel to the ravagers' home dimension (see **Dark Races**, pages 80-81), they would have to go to Southeast Asia where the ETs released them from their proto-dimension. A clever referee with an idea for an adventure set in Southeast Asia might decide to give the players a phony clue regarding the ravagers and their home dimension. The result: The players send their characters jetting off to Cambodia without the first clue to what is really going on.

Limited access also adds a topology to the proto-dimensions. It seems much more consistent if the home proto-dimension of the Morlocks can only be entered from deep underground or that of the cobra people can only be entered from somewhere in Vietnam. This, in fact, could be taken to the extreme and given a kind of "sympathetic magic" aura if the referee exercises a little careful planning. If *Mechaniaca* could only be entered from the industrial northeast states, or, perhaps, only from certain industrial cities like Detroit, Michigan; Gary, Indiana; or Birmingham, England.

Naturally, referees who want to use limited access will have to do a little extra work to define just what parts of Earth correspond to just what proto-dimensions. They will also have to deal with situations where the players really want to send their characters to some far-off place in order to access a proto-dimension at exactly the time when it is least convenient to the referee for them to do so.

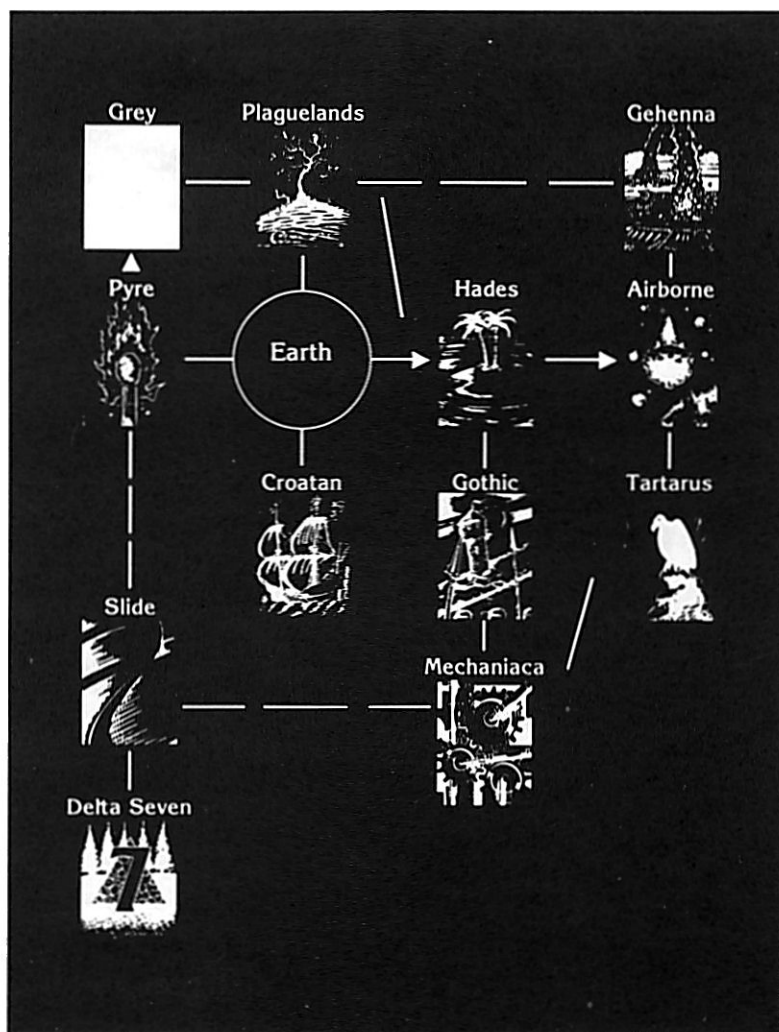
Another way limited access could be handled is to increase the difficulty of opening a portal to the proto-dimension in question the farther away from a corresponding location the character attempting the task was. For example, opening a portal to a dimension that corresponded to the jungles of Southeast Asia from an abandoned farm in Idaho should be extremely difficult.

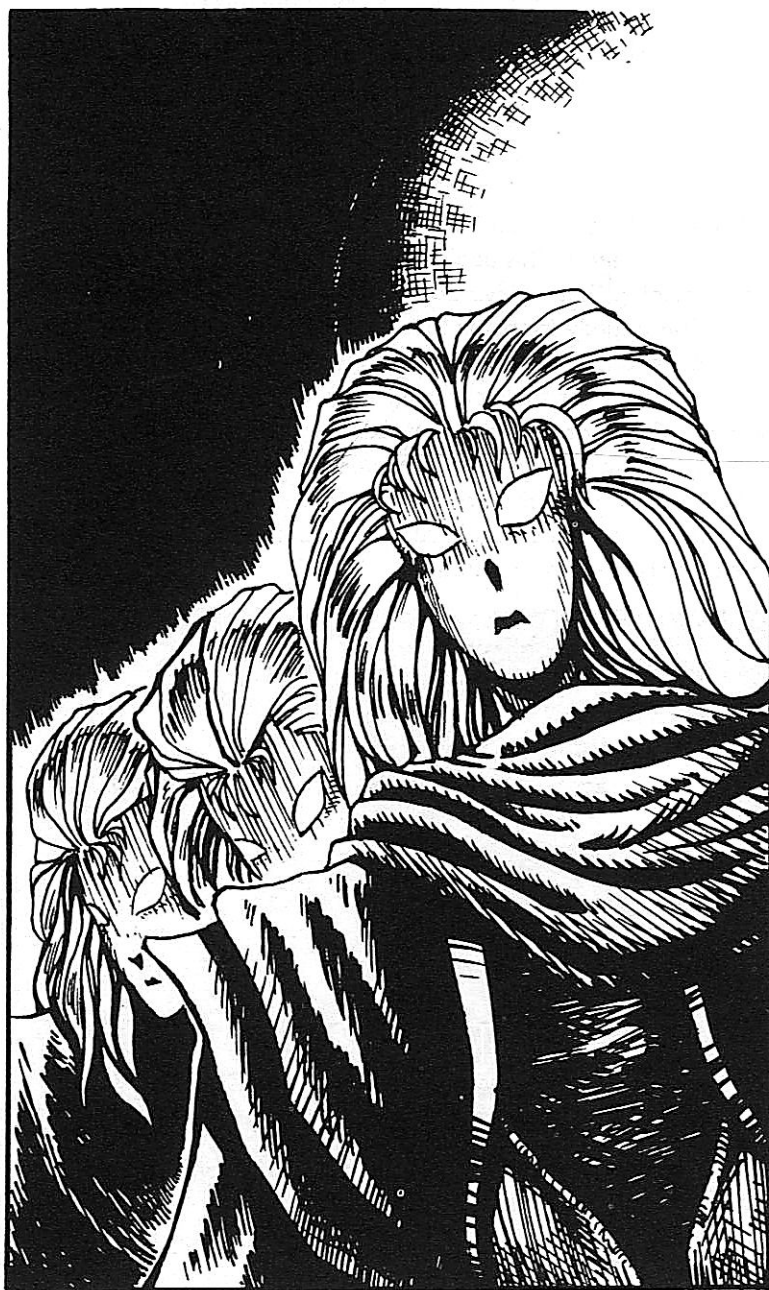
As with the flowchart method, the referee should ignore

ordinary restraints when the PCs are sent to a random proto-dimension as the result of a Catastrophic Failure.

MAINTAINING THE ELEMENT OF MYSTERY

There is no mystic force keeping **Dark Conspiracy** players from reading this book, and, therefore, knowing everything that it says about the proto-dimensions. The tragedy in this is that while players who know all about the proto-dimensions will have a healthy respect for their dangers, they will feel no element of fear or mystery. Instead, they will start working out statistics on their characters and trying to figure out how best, mathematically, to ensure their character's survival. This is exactly the opposite of the basic philosophy behind **Dark Conspiracy**.





There are many techniques which referees can use to keep their **Dark Conspiracy** campaigns from becoming flat and mechanical. As has been said before, many things in **Dark Conspiracy** are left only partially defined so that the referee has a great deal of latitude. There is nothing to keep a referee from designing a proto-dimension which exactly resembles one of those presented in this book except for certain important features.

Keep 'em Guessing: Referees may wish to change

a few things around in order to shake the confidence of players who know too much. For example, a referee might change the setting of Hades from a tropical paradise to an unspoiled wilderness reminiscent of Croatan or a pine forest like that of Delta Seven, in order to mislead players who have "peeked" at this book and will immediately suspect any tropical island they end up on. Just remember to maintain play balance and be consistent.

Names: An important part of keeping the element of mystery in a game is how referees handle proto-dimensional names. Referees should avoid giving the name of a proto-dimension to the players. While the proto-dimensions described in this book are each given a name, the adventurers will never find a sign telling them "Welcome to the Plaguelands," or whatever. Also, just because a proto-dimension is given an "official" name in this book, that isn't necessarily what NPCs in your **Dark Conspiracy** campaign should call it. There is no Board of Extra-Dimensional Nomenclature dutifully assigning official names to proto-dimensions. Ten people might have 10 different names for the same proto-dimension. Let the players decide what they want to call the new proto-dimensions they find rather than handing them the "official" name. This will add to their sense of discovery and avoid giving them hints as to what is coming up.

DESIGNING ADDITIONAL PROTO-DIMENSIONS

Every primal power or elementary substance hints at the existence of a fragmentary dimension. Likewise, every physical law could spawn a dimension with a physics shift. Such dimensions are easy to describe, and relatively easy to make up on the spot. They are most useful when a group of PCs is sent somewhere at random either by accident or by enemy action.

Almost any archetypal concept could be used as the basis for a halfland. The trackless deserts of North Africa, the impenetrable jungle of South America, even the giant parking lot at Disneyland could provide the inspiration for a halfland.

The splinterlands, with their additional complexity, offer more of a challenge to the **Dark Conspiracy** referees but still possibilities abound. What is the home dimension of the fey like? Or the proto-dimensions



which inspired the Norse view of the universe? Inspiration can be taken from the full panoply of literary invention, from Shakespeare to Vonnegut. A proto-dimension based on Rogers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma*, where every 10 minutes everyone breaks into song, has some entertaining possibilities. Proto-dimensions reflecting novels such as George Orwell's *Animal Farm* or movies such as *Soylent Green* have great potential as well.

Name: During its design, a referee might want to assign a temporary name to a proto-dimension for ease in record keeping. The best temporary names are one or two words that summarize the key elements of the proto-dimension. Once a proto-dimension is used, however, the players should be allowed to name it for themselves.

Discontinuity Factors: Assigning discontinuity factors is a matter of personal judgment. How strange is the proto-dimension, compared to Earth? The factors assigned to the proto-dimensions in this book can be used as a guide.

Assimilation: Assimilation effect values are another matter of referee judgment. How different is the

physics of the proto-dimension compared to Earth? What kind of damage will assimilation to this new physics do to a human? Again, use the proto-dimensions in this book as a guide.

Encounters: There can be no hard and fast rules about encounters, as there are so many variables involved. Bear in mind the comments made earlier, however, about making a proto-dimension more than just a patch of terrain to be traversed. Most "one-time" proto-dimensions should not need encounter tables, as all encounters should be of the planned variety (the referee stipulates when and where they occur, according to what best keeps things moving).

In recurring locale proto-dimensions, or in those used for impromptu adventures, encounter tables will take some of the load off of a referee. If using multiple dice on encounter tables, remember when setting them up that the results will be distributed in a bell-curve: on 2D6, the most common encounter should occur on a 7, and the least common on a 2 or a 12. Single dice (D6, D10, D20) will give even results throughout their range.

Experience and the Proto-Dimensions—Optional

The **Dark Conspiracy** rules allow characters to improve their skills by spending experience points on them. In addition to this, referees may want to allow their players to spend their experience points on familiarity with particular proto-dimensions to simulate their overcoming, to some extent, that proto-dimension's discontinuity. The way this works is that with the expenditure of a certain number of experience points it becomes one level less difficult for players to open a portal to a particular proto-dimension.

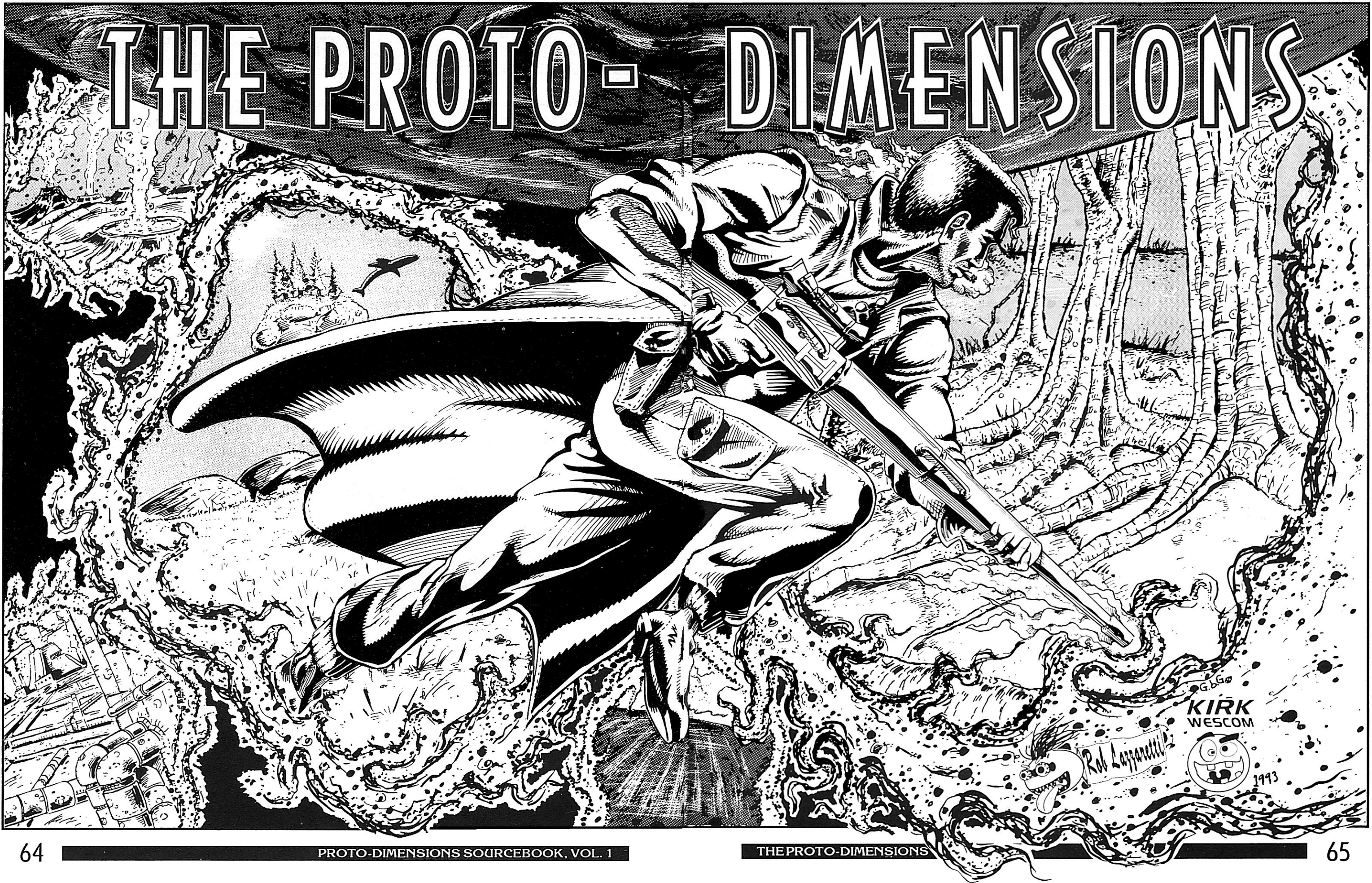
As this effectively doubles the empath's Dimension Walk ability score, referees will want to be very careful about allowing players to do this. In campaigns where 30 or more proto-dimensions are regularly used, the cost should only be 4 or 5 points. In campaigns where only 5 or 6 proto-dimensions are used, the cost should be considerably higher (perhaps 10 or 15 points).

In addition, it is recommended that players only be allowed to spend experience points on a proto-dimension that their characters have spent a significant amount of time in during the current adventure. If Roman went to **Mechaniaca** during one adventure and all the experience points he earned there were spent on increasing his Small Arms (Rifle) skill, and then he fought cobra people in Florida during his next adventure, he should not be allowed to spend the new experience points he earned on familiarity with **Mechaniaca**.

Referees might also decide to allow players to spend experience points to bypass the effects of flowcharting and limited access. In a campaign where **Mechaniaca** only corresponded to the industrial northeast, for example, a player who has spent points on familiarity with **Mechaniaca** could open a portal to the proto-dimension from anywhere in the eastern US and Canada.

It should be stressed that this is an option and that referees are not required to allow players to improve their ability with a particular proto-dimension with the experience points they have earned.

THE PROTO-DIMENSIONS





AIRBORNE: THE DOMAIN OF SKY



Name: Airborne
Type: Halfland
Discontinuity: 2
Assimilation Effect Value: 0

Airborne is a halfland with a discontinuity of 2, and with a slight physics shift. This shift will not harm the characters in and of itself, but it will take some getting used to. Characters in Airborne will not take long at all to find the major difference between it and the others they may have encountered: In Airborne, there is no ground.

The Gravity of the Situation

Airborne, although it has no ground, very definitely has a "down." Everything in Airborne exists in free-fall, pulled by gravity in a single direction. Acceleration due to gravity is small, and

when the PCs arrive in Airborne, they will seem to be floating. After a short time, they will begin to feel a gentle movement of air past them as they accelerate. Eventually, they will reach terminal velocity (the point where gravity and atmospheric drag exactly equal each other) and cease accelerating.

Airborne curves back upon itself, which means that after a few weeks of falling, a person or object will lap their "starting point" (although there is no reasonable way they could know this). Everything entering Airborne arrives on the same plane (i.e., the same level) and then begins falling. Vertical offset is unknown in Airborne, which means that players and referees need not concern themselves with their altitude when moving from Airborne to another proto-dimension. Horizontal movement results in corresponding displacement. Because of the peripatetic nature of the "terrain" in Airborne, however, there are no permanent landmarks for PCs to use (no chalk cliff or grove of gnarled trees) to mark a specific location, and no way to navigate. Gateways and can be built in Airborne, but their construction presents certain engineering problems. Dimension walk devices can exist in Airborne, and function perfectly, provided they are supplied with power.

Fortunately for the PCs, the speed acquired from Airborne's gravity does not carry over when travelling to other proto-dimensions, otherwise they would be killed or seriously injured.

The Unfriendly Skies—Conditions in Airborne

"Landforms": Although there is no "ground" in Airborne, there definitely is terrain. This "terrain" consists of groupings of giant clumps of dirt, called "dirtballs." These groupings, like clusters of small asteroids, fall perpetually through the endless sky. These groupings can be anywhere from a few hundred meters up to several kilometers across and contain as few as 50 or as many as 50,000 individual bodies. The individual dirtballs are, on the average, a few dozen meters in diameter and are covered by a variety of plant and animal life. The dirtballs are irregularly shaped, although they are all roughly spherical. Extremely irregular shapes tend to break up faster, and wind stress on something as large as a dirtball has a much greater effect than on something as small as a human body.

These groupings are not regular in any way, and the individual dirtballs that are involved in them are not flying in formation. The individual dirtballs tumble and bump together, sometimes breaking pieces off of one another, other times sticking together to form larger bodies. Being between two dirtballs as they struck would certainly be fatal for any human being. Avoiding such an ignominious fate is not at all difficult and any conscious character can automatically do so.

There seems to be a cohesive force of some kind that makes the individual dirtballs stay together in groupings, but this cohesion can be overcome by an exceptionally large collision, and small dirtballs are occasionally sent spinning off on divergent vectors to become lone wanderers, drifting aimlessly through the air between the groupings.

"Water" Features: Airborne also has lakes, roughly spheroidal blobs of water falling through the eternal sky. Most lakes are very easy to spot because each trails a thin, wispy contrail of water vapor as it falls, like the tail of a comet.

Lakes, like dirtballs, collide with one another and with soil swarms. When two lakes collide, they are



usually ripped apart and a very large cloud of water vapor forms as evaporation takes over. This ends in the formation of 1D6 new lakes, each of which leaves the encounter with a new vector.

Soil swarms collect moisture by condensation in the early morning, when they are still cool from the night before. The soil absorbs this dew very quickly, and capillary action draws it deep enough that the heat of the late afternoon is not enough to evaporate it all. Plants are thus encouraged to send roots deep into the soil of the dirtball, stabilizing it in the process. The soil dirtballs are held together by these root systems and a certain amount of natural adhesion; there is not enough gravitational attraction between soil particles to hold them together.

Night and Day: Airborne has a day/night cycle of roughly 20 hours, although there is no sun, moon, planets, or stars. At "dawn," the sky begins to brighten, and within an hour the sky is bright as day, the light and heat coming from "above" (that is, it comes from the direction opposite that which everything falls). At "dusk," the sky begins to darken. After an hour, the sky is as dark as it gets, which is about the same as a starlit but moonless night on Earth. Visibility is about 1000 meters for dirtballs, 500 meters for human-sized creatures.

The temperature in Airborne rises and falls in synchronization with the light level, although the larger dirtballs retain the heat of the day for a few hours into the night, and remain cool for several hours into the day. At night it drops to about 10°C (50°F), during the day it can rise as high as 29°C (85°F).

Humans in Airborne

Any PC who is extremely acrophobic (possesses a fear of heights) will find it difficult to function in Airborne. Other characters may be initially unnerved



by their predicament. Characters who cannot successfully make a Difficult: Willpower roll when they enter Airborne for the first time must attempt all tasks at one level greater difficulty than normal, and add 1 to any Panic roll that they have to make. This roll may be attempted again at the end of each hour spent in Airborne. If a character leaves and then returns to the proto-dimension within an hour, another roll is not allowed. This Willpower task only needs to be successfully completed once, after which the character has "learned to cope" with the conditions in Airborne.

Sounds: Even at terminal velocity, the rush of wind is not great. Conversations can be carried out, gunshots and shouts of warning detected, and screams heard over the normal distances for such things.

Movement: Humans in Airborne will find that their falling airspeed can be controlled (like skydivers do) by moving the arms and legs to increase or decrease



drag, although this takes quite some time before any change can be noticed).

Other than falling, humans have two modes of movement in Airborne. They can "swim" at four meters per five seconds and can leap at 16. Leaping movement can only be done when a character has something large and solid to leap from. After leaping, a character continues in the direction jumped for eight phases (40 seconds), but speed is reduced by two meters per five seconds by air resistance (it can be further reduced by up to four meters per five seconds if the PC "swims" against the vector). Characters can make equipment to allow them to travel faster after experiencing Airborne for the first time (Average: Mechanic or Engineering). Such equipment could consist of the aerial equivalent of swim-fins, some form of jetpack, or a more unusual contraption such as a pedal-powered ornithopter. How well such a device works is up to the referee. The EVA multitool (see *DarkTek*, page 65) allows movement 15 for its entire two-minute fuel supply.

Ground and water vehicles are useless in Airborne, for movement purposes at least. Aircraft function normally (more or less). Parachutes and paragliders will take minutes to deploy once opened, but once fully deployed will slow the user's descent to almost nothing.

Shelter: The soil of the dirtballs is quite loose, and it is a fairly easy task to excavate a person-sized cave/foxhole in a couple of minutes with bare hands. Such holes provide concealment, but little in the way of protection from attacking creatures (since they can also dig into the soil easily). Tent pegs, posts, and the like will not be able to anchor themselves in the loose soil of a dirtball firmly enough to hold a tent or shelter in place (the only way to do that is to find a tree/shrub with a large root system and tie the tent or shelter to it).

Combat: Combat in Airborne proceeds according to the normal rules except for the following:

All melee tasks are one level more difficult. Empathic combat is unchanged. In fire combat, recoil has the same effect as in the basic rules (decreasing





accuracy), since uneven rotational velocities will cause the firer to spin. It will be difficult to perfectly compensate for these forces through movement, and the net effect will be a loss of accuracy proportional to the volume of fire. In addition, recoil causes the firer to be pushed in the opposite direction at a speed equal to the weapon's recoil rating in meters per five seconds. For example, a character firing an M16A2 rifle in semiautomatic fire would be propelled backwards at the rate of three meters per five seconds. The same weapon fired at full auto would propel the character backwards at five meters per five seconds. It will be difficult for characters to compensate for this movement unless they are equipped with some form of "swimming" equipment that will enable them to "swim" and fire a weapon at the same time (that is, something that enables the legs to do the "swimming" and the arms to do the firing).

Life in Airborne

The majority of the wildlife found in Airborne consists of small creatures which live in the soil swarms, either in burrows inside the dirtballs or in nests built in the trees/shrubs growing on them. These creatures will seem quite alien to the PCs. In addition, there will be a large number of predators. Characters who are familiar with ocean environments will tend to liken the dirtball swarms with the coral reefs of terrestrial oceans. All of these life forms tend to have large claws for clinging to dirtballs, and some have a form of wing or flipper for propulsion between dirtballs (to escape from a collision).

There are two types of dangerous beasts native to Airborne: piranha birds and skysharks. Neither of these creatures physically resembles its terrestrial namesake, but rather uses the same mode of attack as its Earthly counterpart. Neither is well equipped to deal with the firepower which most minion hunters carry and, as such, do not pose a great danger to most PCs. Instead, the greatest threat in Airborne is from the harpies (see sidebar), a life form not native to Airborne.

Encounter Table

D6	Encounter
1-2	Skyshark
3-5	Piranha Birds
6	Harpies

Roll once every 4 hours spent in Airborne.

Note: In Airborne, since almost nothing ever walks, speeds are given as Climb/Cruise/Dive instead of Walk/Trot/Run. Climb is the sustained climbing speed, Cruise is level speed, and Dive is maximum speed during a dive.

Piranha Birds

# Appear: 6D10	Initiative: 6	Agility: 7
Attack: 80%	Strength: 1	Skill/Damage: 3/2
Move: 30/50/70	Constitution: 1	Hits: 1/2

Piranha birds have the leathery wings and furry body of a large bat, but with the jaws and tearing beak of a hawk. Piranha birds, like their terrestrial namesake, move about in Airborne in large swarms like a school of fish, with no permanent home. A school/flock of piranha birds drops slowly, each individual executing a slow shallow spiral until they come upon an inhabited dirtball cluster. The flock then dives upon the cluster. Small prey they kill and eat individually. Larger prey is overwhelmed by dozens of them at once, swarming in and tearing at the victim with their razor-sharp teeth and claws, then swooping off to swallow their mouthful and circle back for another pass.

Skysharks

# Appear: 1	Initiative: 5	Agility: 7
Attack: 90%	Strength: 7	Skill/Damage: 6/1D10
Move: 20/40/60	Constitution: 9	Hits: 13/25

Skysharks look very much like large penguins, but with larger, toothed jaws. The front pair of flippers is equipped with claws and thus does triple duty (propulsion, steering, and holding prey). The rear pair is enlarged and used primarily for propulsion. Their method of feeding is to conceal themselves in the vegetation on a dirtball and dive upon their unsuspecting victims from above.

Harpies

Harpies are not native to Airborne, but are ideally suited to life there, and have taken up a more or less permanent residence. Harpies are described on page 223 of *Dark Conspiracy*, except that due to the lesser gravity of Airborne, their movement is 30/50/80. Harpies in Airborne like to hide among the dirtballs of a soil swarm, using them for cover as they approach their target. Then, using their terrific speed, they rush their prey using crude javelins, first as missile weapons and then as melee weapons. A normal harpy mode of attack, dropping stones from a great height, is largely ineffective in Airborne.



CROATAN: THE LOST COLONY



Name: Croatan
Type: Halfland
Discontinuity: 1
(Special, see text)
Assimilation Effect Value: 0

Croatan is a halfland, although its amazing history is more reminiscent of one of the splinterlands. The present discontinuity of the proto-dimension is 1, but the discontinuity of Croatan is much more flexible than other proto-dimensions. In campaigns where the referee is using the limited access method to run the proto-dimensions, Croatan should correspond to the mid-Atlantic coast of North America.

Arrival

The PCs' first impression of Croatan is the air—it's clean. Clean in a way that few Americans have experienced since the early 1900s. There are no serious pollutants here, no noxious

exhaust fumes, not even the rank smell of rain-soaked concrete, so familiar to minion hunters everywhere. In fact, the fresh air may actually seem to possess a smell for urban-dwelling PCs. It stings their noses, like ozone during a storm. The sensation is not unpleasant, just unnerving.

As the PCs look around themselves, they see a virgin expanse of forest; again, like nothing they have ever had the opportunity to see on Earth. The trees are huge, often six or more feet in diameter at the base, and stretching higher into the sky than any of the characters had thought a tree could grow. They block most of the light from the ground, leaving the party in a kind of green twilight. The lack of light on the forest floor keeps down the undergrowth. There is a thick, springy blanket of lichen and pine needles, but very little in the way of bushes, vines, or brambles. Such dense ground-cover only grows in clearings, or where one of the great trees has fallen and smaller plants can find the sunlight they need to thrive.

Birds are singing, squirrels leap from branch to branch above, and the scrabbling sounds of small animals can be heard in the distance. The breeze has a hint of salt in it, as if the sea were very near. Nothing at all threatens the PCs. The setting is very near idyllic.

In other words, not at all what experienced characters have come to expect from the proto-dimensions.

Strangers in the Forest

The PCs can explore as they wish, and enjoy the clean air and the presence of green growing things for a brief time. Ideally, the players will be paranoid enough (or experienced enough as minion hunters) to become nervous and expectant without the referee's encouragement. Once the jitters have set in, the group will experience its first encounter in this proto-dimension.

The PCs soon become aware of the fact that they are being followed. A tan and white shape can be seen, flitting from shadow to shadow, hiding behind the boles of the great trees. It appears to be a young woman, following them as they move through the woods, and trying to stay out of sight.

If the PCs allow her to notice that they have seen her, she will gather up her courage, smooth down her skirts, and boldly approach them.

She is brunette, in her late teens or early twenties, and dressed in a tan homespun woolen dress with a white apron-like overgarment and a cloth bonnet. She carries a half-filled wicker basket, and was clearly picking berries from the bushes in a clearing when she spotted the PCs. She will introduce herself as Virginia Dare, daughter of Ananais Dare. Virginia is vivacious, and absolutely enthralled by the PCs—she will make it plain that she has never seen anyone quite like them before.

"Strangers! How wonderful! Has a ship from England come at last?" Now that she has worked up the nerve to approach the PCs and speak, she will be hard to shut up. "You are most oddly dressed, gentles—you are not Spaniards, I hope. I have never met a Spaniard, but my father has and you do not fit his description. What manner of men are you?"

"You must come and meet with my father—he's the Governor, now, since Master White left us, God save him. Follow, and I will guide you to the Fort." With that, she will twirl about, and set off through the woods at a good pace, making sure that the PCs are following.

Virginia's appearance and clothing may leave the PCs puzzled. If any of the players recognize the name Virginia Dare, they will be even more baffled—Virginia Dare was the first English child born in North America,



on the 18th of August, 1587. Since she appears to be about 20, that would seem to make the year around 1607. This might suggest to them that they have travelled back in time, unless the PCs know enough history to remember that Virginia Dare and the rest of the first English colony in America vanished mysteriously long before that date.

History Lesson: The Roanoke Colony

In 1584, Sir Walter Raleigh, the English adventurer, undertook to establish a colony in North America. Raleigh's purpose in setting up a colony in the New World was not exploration, nor was it simple imperialism. Raleigh was a far more pragmatic man than that. He desired fame and (primarily) fortune. Raleigh determined that privateering (government-sanctioned piracy) was the best way to gain both his ends. He acquired a Letter of Marque (a sort of privateering license), and set out to prey on England's greatest enemy at that time, the navy of Spain.

Unfortunately, acting as a privateer against the Spanish treasure fleets meant sailing the Caribbean, where there were no friendly ports for English ships to use as re-supply points. In order to make privateering really pay, a safe haven had to be developed in the New World, preferably in a spot that the Spanish could not easily find or attack.

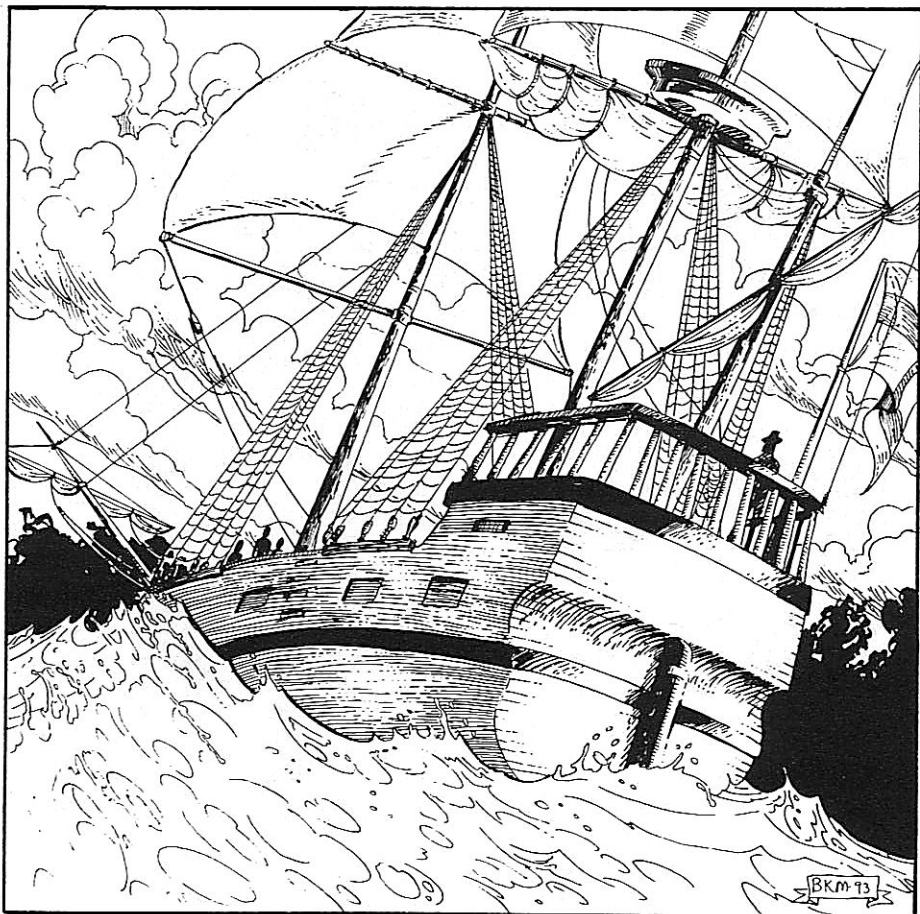
Such a location would ideally be north of the Spanish-held areas, and as near as possible to the sea-routes from England to the Caribbean. The outer banks of what would one day be North Carolina seemed ideal. The islands there form a chain, some distance out to sea from the coast of North Carolina proper. A colony sited on the islands in between the Outer Banks and the Carolina coast would be sheltered from the weather—and hidden from the Spanish.

Having selected his site, Sir Walter Raleigh recruited colonists from among the dispossessed in England, and, with the assistance of Sir Richard Grenville and John White, placed a settlement on the

island of Roanoke in May of 1587. The colony was named Virginia, in honor of Queen Elizabeth, who was known as the Virgin Queen. To an outside observer, the future seemed bright, but within the colony, the seeds of destruction had already been sown.

The expedition's vessels were commanded by Sir Richard Grenville, a man of high station and considerable wealth, but small ability as a leader. Grenville's earlier attempts to place a colony in the Outer Banks had already come to disaster—he had settled only military men, as a garrison. They had neither the knowledge nor the inclination to become farmers, and made their living by taking what they needed or wanted from the local Indian tribes. Grenville's original colony had been a complete failure, and served only to make the Indians wary of European intentions.

In command of the daily affairs of the colony was Ralph Lane—a stern disciplinarian, who prided himself on his ability to maintain order among the “lesser persons” who made up the colony. He had little regard





for those “lesser persons,” and disliked associating himself with them. Lane had been the leader of Grenville’s colony as well, for a time, and distinguished himself primarily by conducting a surprise attack on a band of Algonkian Indians. The Indians had refused to provide the colony’s soldiers with food and supplies, and Lane felt that that indicated their intention to attack the colony, once their supplies ran out.

The character of the settlers at Roanoke was somewhat better than that of Grenville’s colony, but they were not exactly heroic individuals. Most were ex-military men and their wives, or members of the poor lower class, willing to take part in adventurism against the Spanish in return for a chance to own land, even land so far away from their original homes.

Leavening this group were colonists recruited from among London’s tradesmen: apprentices, journeymen, and masterless young gentlemen (often younger sons of noble houses, who were unlikely to inherit anything significant). The young gentlemen, in particular, were looking for adventure, i.e., looking for trouble, and saw the colonization attempt as a great lark. Few had any farming experience.

From this odd lot, a viable settlement had to be made. One bright point in the otherwise murky social structure of Roanoke was Governor John White, a gentleman, artist, and scholar. White would eventually take over the leadership of the colony, and attempt to patch up the rifts torn by Lane and Grenville between the settlers and the Indians.

How It All Turned Out

Once the colony town was set up, and a small fortress of earthen banks erected, White and Grenville set out for England to get additional provisions for the colony—tools, manufactured goods, gunpowder, and firearms, as well as beer and wine, flour, and other foodstuffs. The Roanoke colony was left in the control of Ananais Dare, White’s son-in-law.

The colony enjoyed less than cordial relations with the local Algonkian chieftain, Moratok. He did not trust the English and, given the actions of Grenville’s soldiers, and even some of the Roanoke colonists, he had good reasons. Before a year was out, both sides decided to solve the problem once and for all—and amazingly for their time, both sides chose not to engage in wholesale slaughter. The colonists resolved to move to another island, Croatan, which Raleigh had previously explored, and where the Indians were supposedly more amenable to becoming Christians. One Indian from the Croatan tribe was with the colony already: a young convert named Manteo, whom Raleigh had taken to England on a previous trip.

The Indian shaman who advised Moratok, Quiyoughqwohanock, resolved to make sure that the settlers went far away, farther than Croatan Island. Farther than anyone had ever gone before.

Quiyoughqwohanock, as a shaman, was empathically aware, and familiar, in a limited way, with the proto-dimensions. When the settlers had gathered their goods, and readied the small ship that Grenville and White had left for their use, he exerted his empathic and sorcerous abilities, and sent the invaders as far away as he could imagine...

The Rest of the Story (On Earth)

Governor White’s ships were supposed to call again at Roanoke the following summer, with the additional supplies needed in the colony. When he had left, White had realized that the settlement was in a precarious





position, and that the colonists might have to abandon Roanoke for another site if Powhattan (or the Spanish) decided to move against them. He arranged for a secret sign to be left at the old colony site on Roanoke, if the colonists had to leave. The arrangement had been simple—carve the name of the place the colony would be moving to on several prominent trees—and cut a Maltese cross above it if the colony was forced to move because of Indian or Spanish attacks.

In 1590, after several attempts (foiled in part by the ongoing war with Spain, and Grenville's incompetence), White and his crew did return to Roanoke. They found the colony site abandoned. The colonists did leave the secret signs at the Roanoke site. A tree was found, carved with the letters CRO. A post of the stockade, just to the right of the entrance, was carved with the word CROATAN. Neither were marked with the distress-cross, so White knew that the colonists had left in an orderly fashion.

Due to difficulties with the ships, White decided to return to England before seeking out the new "Citie of Raleigh" on Croatan Island—he felt that the colony was safe, living near the most friendly tribe of Indians in the area.

In the following year, White made landfall at Croatan Island, and found not a single sign anywhere that English settlers had ever been there. The Roanoke colonists were never seen on Earth again, although several attempts to find them were made—some well into the following century. Ultimately, history assumed that the colony failed, and that the surviving Europeans were adopted by one of the tribes or sub-tribes of the interior.

The Rest of the Story (Off Earth)

By the colonists' reckoning, it has been 20 years since they moved from Roanoke Island to Croatan Island—or what they think is Croatan Island. Quiyoughqwohanock's sorcery encompassed them, and passed over them completely, leaving them unaware of its existence. The colonists were sent into a proto-dimension so similar to the Earth they left, that they have never noticed the difference.

The leader of the colony is Governor Ananais Dare, Virginia Dare's father, and John White's son-in-law and hand-picked successor. He has kept the colony and its settlers in good order, and has managed to stay

on friendly terms with the Algonkian Indians of Croatan.

Although the colonists have had no contact with England in the past two decades, they have managed to survive, and even prosper. They have adopted many Indian ways, and in some cases, even intermarried with the Indians. The population of the settlement has grown slowly. When the new "Citie of Raleigh" was founded, its population was less than 100; now the population is nearly 130, and two infants now form the second English generation born in America.

The colonists have for the most part accepted the fact that they are a "lost colony." Despite their hopes, Governor White has never been able to return with any supplies from England. Most of the colonists have come to expect that he never will, believing that a war, plague, or other disaster has ruined England and prevented the return of a ship.

Once, at Ananais Dare's request, an expedition went back to Roanoke, to check for any signs of the supply ship's return. The men who volunteered to go don't like to be questioned about that trip. They say that they were attacked by spirits out in the forest. Headless Indians, ghostly gray-white "goblins" shaped like men, and other monsters harried them constantly and forced them to abandon their voyage. They returned without ever reaching Roanoke Island. No one else has attempted the journey.

The "Citie of Raleigh"

The physical layout of the Croatan colony is much like its original incarnation on Roanoke. The settler's houses are timber framed, and generally contain one or two rooms. The walls are wattle-and-daub (made of woven twigs covered with clay), the roofs are thatched, much like the homes of peasants in England. The dozen or so homes and shops in the village are surrounded by a log stockade some 12 to 14 feet high.

A short distance away from the settlement stockade is the fort. Two large buildings are in the center, one a barracks, and the other a storehouse. The fort walls are earthworks, ranging from 10 to 12 feet high, and at least nine feet thick at the base. The outer faces of the walls slope in at a steep angle, and are covered with sod to prevent erosion. The earthworks are topped by sharpened stakes which point outward, set closely enough together to hinder any attempts to scale the walls. Outside the wall is a ditch, steep-sided,



and generally eight feet deep, following the outline of the fort walls.

The overall shape of the fort, if it were seen from above, is cruciform, with each branch of the cross coming to a point at the end. This arrangement of walls allows for good crossing fields of fire, in case of attack. It is impossible to approach a wall or corner without coming under fire from the wall section opposite.

The two points of the fort which overlook the harbor have small bronze cannons mounted in them. These cannons, removed from Grenville's flagship, the *Tiger*, and later carried laboriously from the first colony site on Roanoke Island, represent the colony's only serious defense against Spanish attack.

Making Friends with the Settlers

When Virginia Dare leads the PCs into the "Citie," the colonists will initially be guarded, but friendly. It has been 20 years since they have seen other white men, and many will express disbelief and amazement. In particular, they will be astounded by the player characters' clothing, and mannerisms. England certainly has changed in 20 years! The colonists' first questions will concern Sir Walter Raleigh, and his current doings. They will also want to know why they have been abandoned for all these years. Where is the relief ship the group came in? What supplies have they brought? Did they remember the muskets? The powder? The new millstone? In short order, the player characters will be flooded with questions.

If the PCs go along with the colonists' expectations of them, and claim to be from Sir Walter Raleigh, they had better have a source of supplies and gear close to hand. These people have been waiting a long time, and they will not take kindly to being tricked or swindled. If instead the PCs claim to be shipwrecked travellers, or any other reasonably "normal" thing, the colonists will be disappointed that relief is not at hand, but they will be as helpful as possible to the PCs.

Note to the Referee: Keep careful track of what the PCs tell the colonists, and what the colonists are allowed to see of the PCs' unusual clothing and accouterments. Some of this information will come back to haunt the players later.

The PCs would do well to remember that, although colonists may be friendly, they have a nearly medieval mindset. They are easily frightened of the unknown, or of anything that smacks of "witchcraft" or "diabolism." If, at any time, the PCs attempt to explain the true situation to the colonists, they had best take extreme care to couch their explanations in language that the colonists can understand. It would be all too easy for the settlers to perceive the concept of "people from another dimension" as "creatures from the nether regions." They will then act accordingly: Witches are traditionally hanged or burned alive. Supernatural creatures will probably be shot where they stand (and then burned to ashes on a pyre).

Life in the Islands

The Croatan colony has become self-sufficient by harsh necessity. The colonists produce rough linen and wool garments, but often the men wear doeskin, fashioned in the manner of Indian clothing. They have their own pottery kiln, and brickworks both in the open ground between the stockade wall and the Fort. The settlers have access to native copper deposits, and worked copper implements are their most common metal tools. They have a smithy, but no regular supply of iron except for the sparse bog iron deposits in the area, and do not have the facilities to cast it if they had any quantity. Iron tools and implements, particularly cooking gear, are treated as valuable heirlooms, and are carefully preserved (the blacksmith doubles as coppersmith and spends much of his time repairing broken tools). While the colonists can produce gunpowder, they cannot manufacture muskets, and the five they have are lovingly cared for. What little gunpowder they manufacture is stored inside the fort, and will be used to fire the two small cannons in case of an attack on the settlement. Most hunting is done with Indian-type bows, although the colonists mostly use copper arrowheads instead of chipped stone.

The Colonists

The settlement contains about 130 souls, some of whom are treated in more detail below:

It would be unwise for the PCs to allow the colonists' "doctor" to provide medical care, since, like any knowledgeable man of his times, Doctor Martyn still



diagnoses things according to the four humors known to medieval scholars. Contagion and sanitation are equally unknown. On the other hand, John Spendlove, the local barber, is quite adept at sewing up wounds, and many goodwives (a 16th-century term meaning the same thing as "Mrs.," and sometimes shortened to "Goody") know some herbal remedies, learned from the Indians.

Griffyn Jones is the colony's spiritual leader. He is a tall man, with a shock of white hair which stands straight up on top of his head. He maintains, as closely as possible, the solemn and sober dress expected of a man of the cloth. Reverend Jones is not an over-friendly man, and will steer a wide berth around the player characters. If the PCs' party includes any women, he will be scandalized and outraged by the immodesty of their modern dress. ("Women in breeches! Who can believe such a thing? It is an abomination...")

Joachim Ganz, a lapidary, acts as the colony's assayer—many of the younger men are, like their fathers before them, searching for gold in their spare time, but so far only a few nuggets of any size have been found. Unfortunately for the gold-panners, there is very little that they can do with their wealth: There is nothing in the colony to spend it on. Ganz is over 60 now, and his apprentice Jack Harvy does most of the actual work. Jack is 19 years old, and has the distinction of being the first male child born in the colony. Since he is Virginia Dare's closest contemporary in age, he is comfortably expectant that she will marry him some day—perhaps soon. Virginia's ideas about this remain her own secret. If any of the PCs become attached to Virginia, or begin to pay her court, Jack Harvy will develop a strong hatred of that character, and will do what he can to thwart the PCs' plans.

An unusual member of the community at the fort is Manteo, a healthy but aging Algonkian Indian. Manteo is the unofficial "ambassador" between the colonists and the local Indians. He was captured by Raleigh as a youth, and taken to England itself, where he lived for several years. He has accepted Christianity, and, over the years, most of the colonist's European ways. The colonists, particularly the Dare family, treat him as a respected elder statesman.



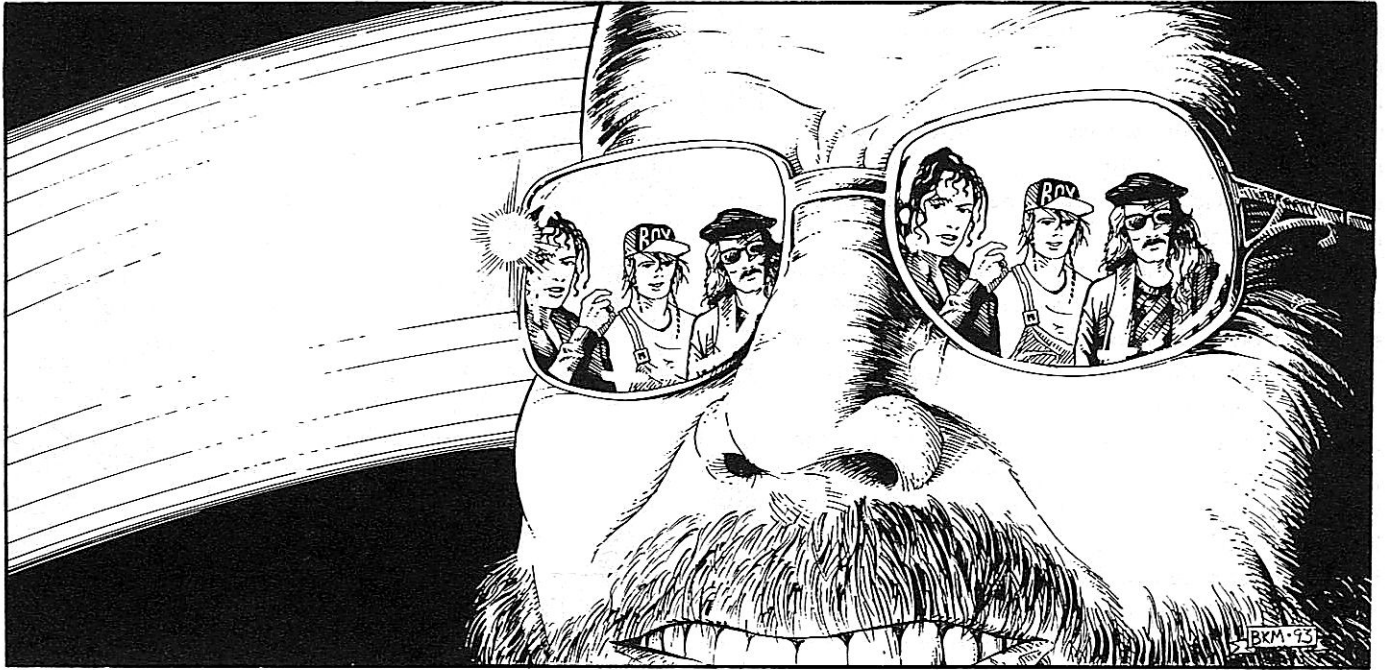
Living History

After the first rush of questions, the PCs are left to themselves, for the most part. They are treated as honored guests, of course, and many individuals may seek them out with additional questions, but they will not (at first) be expected to take part in the daily work of the colony.

The PCs will no doubt start to investigate their situation, and attempt to discover the nature of the Croatan proto-dimension. At this time, the referee can begin to feed the information from the above history lesson to the PCs, in the form of conversations with the settlers.

The PCs may take several days to snoop around the "Citie of Raleigh," the fort, and even the local Indian villages. News of their arrival is all that they hear, and they will soon realize that they have raised the expectations of the colonists.

For the past decade, the colonists have believed themselves to be forgotten, and secretly, each has given up hope of seeing a supply ship from England again. These beliefs were never spoken aloud, of course, but in their hearts, the colonists knew that they had been abandoned. Now however, the presence of strangers has again kindled hope in their hearts, however irrational that hope might be. The settlers have been reminded that there are other people out in the world, and perhaps someday the lost colony will be found again.



The Relief Ship Arrives

A few days after the PCs' arrival, there is another momentous event. A ship has been sighted on the horizon. It will take the better part of a day for it to arrive, and when it comes at last into the bay, the colony will be excited to a fever pitch. The ship is flying an English flag.

As evening descends, a small boat is lowered, and 10 sailors will row to shore, amid much cheering from the assembled colonists. Leading the shore party is none other than Governor White, fatter and older perhaps, but hale and hearty all the same. He will greet Ananais Dare like a long-lost father, and exclaim over what a beauty Virginia has grown up to be.

Although the colonists do not see anything strange about the shore party, the PCs will quickly perceive certain...peculiarities. The ship's crew and officers are dressed oddly. Elements of modern dress—specifically the PCs' dress—are incorporated into the crew's clothing. If a PC is wearing jeans, then some of the sailors will be wearing blue denim pantaloons. If a PC is wearing a T-shirt with a slogan or insignia, similar things will be embroidered on the doublets of some of the ship's officers. Baseball caps with plumes of ostrich feathers, high-top, lace-up, rubber-soled seaboots, and even oddities like

mirrored sunglasses will be visible (Governor White himself is wearing a pair of gold-rimmed Serengetti Vermilions). Weapons will be odd-looking mixes of the PCs' weaponry and those of the 16th century (imagine a matchlock M16, for example). If the PCs' group contains female characters, there will be women among the sailors, dressed almost identically to the female PCs.

Skepticism

The PCs will quickly realize that these "people" are not normal. It may take them a little while longer to realize that Governor White's group is dressed in what the colonists might expect 20 years of European fashion to have produced, given that they believe that what the PCs are wearing is modern English dress. In fact, that is exactly the case: In Croatan, what you expect is what you get.

Dark Dreams

Night will fall, and Governors White and Dare will retire to the Dare house, to catch up on 20 years of old news. The shore party will be made welcome, and will be as hounded with questions as the PCs were upon their arrival.

Governor Dare graciously introduces White to the



Going Outside

PCs, of course, and invites them to be a part of the celebrations. White seems to be a friendly and personable man. He is a bit full of himself, and full of blustery good sentiment, but there is nothing sinister about him, despite the PCs' suspicions that all is not right.

Player paranoia being what it is, the oddity of White's sudden arrival—and his bizarre mode of dress—will stimulate a good deal of fear in the party. Now is the referee's chance to use that fear. In Croatan, for reasons explained below, fear is a dangerous emotion to feel. Fear is partly the expectation that something bad is going to happen—and in Croatan, what you expect is what you get.

If the PCs have been speculating that a particular Darkling force or other may be working behind the scenes in the colony, or if the players fear or dislike a particular Darkling entity, they should face what they expect to face—suddenly, and without warning.

It is up to the referee to create this encounter out of the PCs' reasonable expectations. If the PCs think that dark elves are toying with the colonists, a group of dark elves will ambush the party as they are leaving the Dare house that evening. If instead the PCs have figured out that the entire situation is the work of a daemon they have encountered in the past, send it in. Likewise, if the PCs have expressed the idea that the "Citie of Raleigh" might be an extraterrestrial's idea of a human zoo, let them encounter ETs or evidence thereof. If the PCs have no specific fears, but suspect something, let them find traces of that something (footprints, discarded cigar butts, and so on) to fuel their paranoia.

If there is a Darkling attack, it should take place in a quiet area of the colony, away from the eyes of the settlers and of White's crew. The attack should strike suddenly, and be over just as suddenly. The PCs should not face overwhelming odds, even if they expect to be outgunned. None of the characters should be seriously wounded in this encounter, unless high-tech medical help is available.

In addition, if Jack Harvy has developed a dislike for one of the PCs, he will take this opportunity to hinder his rival. He will not attack the character directly, but he might, for example, shove his rival into the Darkling's line of fire, or make off with his rival's most useful weapon. Jack's goal is to get his rival killed, without the blame attaching to himself in any way.

Now that the kid gloves are off, the PCs will certainly want to continue their investigation of the Croatan proto-dimension. They will have plenty of time, as the colonists are all involved in the unloading of White's ship.

White's crew are all friendly to the PCs, and extraordinarily helpful to the colonists. They see nothing strange about either their own style of dress, or that of the PCs. The English they speak is an odd mixture of the stilted 15th-century English used in the settlement, and modern slang. Again, they see nothing unusual about this.

The PCs will have to search elsewhere for their answers. If they leave the island, they will find that the Croatan proto-dimension is exactly what they expect the historical North American continent in the 16th century to have looked like.

If the PCs travel farther afield than 25 kilometers or so, things will begin to change. The terrain will be less hilly, less natural-seeming. The vegetation will become sparse, and noticeably different from Earth vegetation, even that of centuries ago. Trees will be stubby, their leaves broad, thick, and fleshy. Birds and animals will all but disappear. Those few animals which can still be found will be burrow dwellers, able to hide within their secret lairs.

The PCs will notice, as they travel, that the weather itself seems to fade away. Day and night still exist, but there is little change in temperature between the two, and less change in illumination than one might expect. There are fewer and fewer stars in the sky each night. There is no wind at all, anymore.

Eventually, the dirt itself will begin to alter. It will begin to look gelid and thick, like mud made from soil and glycerine. The ground will begin to feel as if it quivers with every step the PCs take. Animal burrows can still be found, but their openings look less like holes in the ground, and more like...open wounds.

When the PCs examine a burrow, they will find that the badger-like creatures inside are half-formed, as if they are being "born" out of the fleshy earth itself. If the PCs investigate other burrows, they will see a variety of creatures: squirrels, birds, even deer, forming out of the fleshlike soil of Croatan. In one burrow, they will find creatures that look like humans—coppery skin, dark hair, and even the beginning buds of feather and



shell jewelry. Algonkian Indians, forming from the fleshlike earth itself.

The Truth Revealed

The truth is, these creatures are all simulacra—nothing in the entire proto-dimension is real, except the English colonists. Even the Indians are not “real” humans, except for Manteo; they are all parts of the whole. The entire proto-dimension is alive—one single creature, filling the entire volume of Croatan.

If the PCs go far enough, they cannot go any farther—the space within the proto-dimension loops around, and they will find themselves coming back to the colony. It is impossible to travel more than 100 kilometers in any direction.

The living creature that fills the Croatan proto-dimension is highly empathic, and is also a strong receptive telepath. It is not intelligent in any way, nor is it a Dark Minion. It is simply a massive entity which reacts to the empathic emanations of creatures which come into its proto-dimension. It senses what is in their minds, and shapes parts of itself to mimic that mental image.

Twenty years ago, when Quiyouhqwohanock cast the Roanoke colonists into this proto-dimension, they expected to see a forested island, and that is what the proto-dimension’s contents became. What form the Croatan-entity had assumed before their arrival can only be guessed at. Perhaps Quiyouhqwohanock or other shamans shaped it to their expectations before the colonists were sent there...

In the succeeding years, the colonists have never really noticed that their lives hold few surprises. Those things that they expect to happen, happen. So long as all the colonists stay together, the Croatan-entity senses only the average of all their individual expectations. In other words, nothing much happens that the community does not expect. On the rare occasions when individuals have gone beyond the colonized area, they have been turned back by the products of their own imaginative fears. That is what happened to Dare’s expedition back to Roanoke, years ago.

So long as the colonists do not all succumb to fear or strange imaginings all at once, the Croatan proto-dimension is relatively safe. Of course, there are certain difficulties: Henry Mylton went out into the

forest one day, to chop wood. By chance, he severed an artery in his leg with a missed blow of his axe, and bled to death, all alone.

That evening, back in the settlement, Rose Mylton (and everyone else) had every expectation that Henry would be back before nightfall, with his load of wood—and so he was. No one noticed that Henry seemed withdrawn and lacking in creativity after that night—he had never been very creative to begin with. He acts just like everyone expects he should act...

In this way, 17 of the settlers have been replaced by the Croatan-entity. Of the 130 people in the colony only 113 are human. Likewise, Governor White and all the men on his ship are simply created out of the colonist’s expectations—expectations that were raised by the PCs’ arrival. Bear in mind, the Croatan-entity does not do this out of malice, or any other human emotion. It is simply the way that the creature reacts to empathic signals. The creature cannot voluntarily stop reacting to the empathic vibrations of the life forms sharing its proto-dimension.

Getting Out (The Easy Way)

In Croatan, the effects of assimilation are not particularly severe—the proto-dimension simply gains the ability to read and anticipate that person’s expectations. In some ways, this can be an advantage, if the PCs have figured out the nature of their assimilation, and the nature of Croatan itself.

Assimilated PCs will no longer be able to travel outside the colonized area of Croatan, until they realize the truth about the Croatan-entity. The proto-dimension will be able to read the PCs’ expectations of what they will see and hear, and provide it. Unless the PCs expect trouble, or succumb to fear, they will find their journey outside the human-influenced area singularly uneventful. They will encounter more forest, more non-hostile Indian tribes, etc.

Attempting to travel in other ways while attuned can be interesting. It is not actively harmful, but it can have an insidious effect. Eventually, the PCs will tire of Croatan, and decide to leave, though they may prefer to use the term escape. In any case, they will set out, expecting to dimension walk back to Earth. It is a reasonable expectation, and in Croatan, what you expect is what you get.



The trip is easy, but, after all, Croatan is currently very similar to Earth, and so it doesn't have a very high discontinuity. If the PCs do not become suspicious, they will feel right at home on "Earth." It may take days or even weeks for the PCs to discover that they are still in Croatan, and that they are simply creating a new "colonized area" based upon their own expectations of what they will find as they travel around. They may even have other adventures, fighting minions and winning (no one ever expects to lose, after all).

A good touch would be for the referee to "end" the adventure with the PCs "safe at home" and begin another adventure at the next regular gaming session. Let the group get a little bit into the "next adventure" and then spring a little surprise on them.

Meeting Virginia Dare (Again)

If they have been particularly unobservant, the PCs' first clue that something is wrong may be the day that a Croatan colonist shows up on their "Earth" doorstep, frightened and very, very confused.

Virginia Dare followed the PCs when they "left," for whatever reason. Perhaps she is curious as to the actual origin of the PCs (since they are obviously not an advance-group for Governor White's men); perhaps she has become infatuated with one of them; perhaps she has another reason (her motivation is the referee's choice). In any case, Virginia followed them into the woods as they left Croatan. She trailed them, and saw the world change around the PCs, as they stood entranced by their "dimension walk." Frightened by the strange vision, she ran back to the colony.

Even though she was badly frightened by the experience, she remained curious about the PCs and what she had seen. It has taken days, but she has gathered up her courage again, and come into the "modern" city to look for her mysterious friends.

Virginia will explain to the PCs that she simply walked through the forest until she came to their city. She experienced nothing that could be described as dimension travel.

Naturally, when the PCs check her story, they will discover that she is right. Now that their skepticism is engaged, they will be able to walk out of their "Earth" and back into the forest outside the Croatan colony.



Virginia Dare

If Virginia Dare has become infatuated with one of the group, and the referee is willing, there is no reason why she should not accompany the group back to the real Earth. She will, of course, have problems adjusting to the new and different world she finds there.

At first, it might seem that a 20-year-old woman from the 16th century might have little to contribute to the fight against the Darklings, and could serve no purpose other than comic relief or a romantic plot device. Consider, however, that Virginia has lived her entire life in a primeval wilderness (well, in a place that acted like the colonists expected a primeval wilderness to act), and has acquired skills suitable to her environment. These might include Climbing, Observation, Stalking, Stealth, Swimming, Tracking, perhaps even Archery and Thrown Weapon. Also, Virginia is very intelligent and extremely curious. With a the right training, she might turn into a very effective minion hunter (and one of the more unusual NPCs a referee could ask for—consider the reaction when she applies for a driver's license and puts her date of birth as "August 18th, 1587").

Level: Novice

Skills: As per novice NPC, with referee's additions per notes above.

Normal Armament: None



Paranoia Strikes Back

Under the circumstances, the PCs will probably have little doubt that they are the subjects of some insidious Darkling experiment. As before, whatever Dark Race they blame for their situation should put in an appearance. After all, the PCs now expect that, with the secret out, the Darklings have no further reason to remain hidden.

The referee should hit the party again, and hit them hard—they expect it, after all. This time, however, the referee should make sure that the Darkling forces do exactly what the PCs expect them to. Every idea that the players have about their enemies' tactics and goals should be played out. If a player expresses an alternative idea, he or she should see it immediately begin to take place, even if that totally invalidates the Darkling's previous actions and motives.

In short, this encounter is the referee's last chance to point out that the "Darklings" are just part of the nature of Croatan, just extensions of the Croatan-entity, and not real Darklings at all.

And since they are not real, they will not have any real empathic powers, another clue to the true nature of the proto-dimension.

Getting Out (For Real)

Once the PCs have discovered the whole truth about Croatan, they will become suspicious of anything that seems too predictable—too much like their reasonable expectations. The referee should allow the players time to "enjoy" the fruits of their recursive paranoia before letting them escape Croatan for real. The ideal outcome of this adventure is to leave the players some faint doubt whether their characters have really escaped, even weeks afterward. If the players remain paranoid about the reality of their surroundings for the next adventuring session or two, the referee can consider the time adventuring in Croatan well spent.

Going Back

A proto-dimension which is used for only one adventure seems like a waste of valuable resources. An entire proto-dimension should contain the seeds of several gaming sessions. So, how can the referee induce the PCs to return to Croatan? There is nothing of value there that is trustworthy—the PCs will probably never be able to firmly believe in the actual existence of anything they find in Croatan ever again. The only things that really exist there are the English settlers, a few of their original goods, and the Croatan-entity. There simply is nothing else. None of the plants, animals, birds, or Indians are real—not even the gold is real. It is all just part of the Croatan-entity. So why bother?

One reason to return is the colonists themselves—the "Citie of Raleigh" could be helpful allies of the PCs, in some circumstances. Croatan is one of the few proto-dimensions which can support human life for long periods of time. If the PCs have taken care to stay on friendly terms with the settlement, they will have a safe refuge in times of trouble.

Another point—objects and creatures from proto-dimensions maintain their extra-dimensional nature even in the Earth's dimension, until they are assimilated by Earth's physical laws. If it were possible to bring a piece of the Croatan life form to Earth, it would remain mutable and responsive to the expectations of the creatures around it, at least for a while. Such a thing might be useful to the PCs at some point. Of course, it might also be useful to Dark Minions...





DELTA SEVEN

The proto-dimension known as Delta Seven is a fairly small and innocuous place which has remained untouched by the Darkling blight. This does not mean that it is a safe place for minion hunters to visit, just that the dangers they will face there will be more mundane than those found in other proto-dimensions. Delta Seven has a discontinuity of 1, but it is a hardened proto-dimension, so all attempts to enter it will be one level more difficult than normal. Referees using the flowchart method should have Delta Seven accessible only from Earth. Referees using the limited access method should make Delta Seven accessible only from a single, very small area (preferably near where the PC group spends most of its adventuring time).

Conditions

Delta Seven is only about 50 kilometers across and has curved edge effects (that is, walking 50 kilometers in any given direction will bring you back to where you started). It has no physics shift from Earth normal. The atmosphere and gravity here are well within human tolerances and while the weather is not particularly pleasant, it is not hazardous either. The sun (or what passes for a sun in this proto-dimension) is almost constantly obscured by clouds. The temperature never gets much above 10° Celsius (50° Fahrenheit), and if it isn't drizzling it has just stopped or is getting ready to do so.

The terrain in Delta Seven is unspoiled wilderness. The high lands are covered with pristine coniferous forests which resemble those of the Pacific northwest. The lowlands are a muddy swamp with occasional islands of waist-high grass and brush.

There are no particularly dangerous life forms indigenous to Delta Seven. The analogues of small mammals, birds, and insects are the only fauna that adventurers will notice. No predator larger than an earth fox (8-10 kilos) has evolved here. The plants there are equally harmless. Of course, the life forms in Delta Seven are entirely unlike those of Earth and will not look quite like anything the PCs have ever seen before. The plant and animal life will seem to be oddly colored and shaped—vaguely familiar-looking, but demonstrably not Earthly in origin.

Nothing in Delta Seven is poisonous, and many animals and plants are edible, but nothing is very

palatable. PCs who manage to capture some of the small animals they find will lose their appetite while dressing their prey—they do not smell wholesome. The plants somewhat resemble edible Earthly fare, but are no more appetizing than the animals. Characters who insist on eating materials native to this proto-dimension will be slightly queasy for several hours afterward, but there will be no other ill-effects.

There is, in fact, only one major danger in all of Delta Seven. It is a danger that has faced the human race for centuries before the release of the Dark Ones by the ETs—other human beings.

History

While working to recruit sleeper agents in Europe, a CIA operative named Robert Siebel stumbled upon the encroachments of the Dark Masters. He managed to foil the Darkling plot which he discovered and escaped from the experience with a dose of terror unlike any he had known before, but relatively little physical harm. Assuming his ordeal was over, Siebel informed his superior of what he had discovered. This act nearly resulted in Siebel's death. Unbeknownst to Siebel, his control was an Igor serving a Dark Lord—a Dark Lord who was not amused by Siebel's discovery.

Fortunately for Siebel, his encounter with the Darklings awoke the latent empathic abilities which he possessed and, with the aid of these new neuropathic powers, he managed to kill his control with a trap that the control had laid in hopes of eliminating Siebel himself. In a debriefing, Siebel, now aware of the extent of the Darkling invasion, never mentioned his encounter with the Darklings and, using a story he made up, managed to convince the CIA that his control's death was the work of foreign agents who had penetrated his cover. Eventually Siebel was reassigned to field duty in another part of the world, an event which bought him some time.

He used this time to learn more about the new menace threatening humanity and to develop his



Name: Delta Seven
Type: Splinterland
Discontinuity: 1 (Hardened)
Assimilation Effect Value: 0



empathic powers. After the ordeal with his former control, he was very circumspect about his encounter with the Darklings. While he could never be sure who served the Dark Lords, he knew he must find people who would help with the battle he knew was coming. Using the CIA's techniques for recruiting sleeper agents, Siebel began to slowly, painstakingly build a cadre of dedicated individuals, primarily empathaths, that he was sure could be trusted.

Ultimately, Siebel was promoted to an administrative position. This put him in charge of a number of special operations. Siebel always did his duty, but felt torn. He knew that his country—and his world—were in grave danger, but he also knew that the moment he spoke up about it he would either end up in a coffin or a straight jacket. He was never sure who he could trust. His boss? His boss' boss? The Director of Central Intelligence? The President? Anyone?

Echo Wisdom

Eventually Siebel devised a plan. Since he couldn't be sure who in the system he could trust, he would trust no one. Siebel decided that he would become his own branch of the government, a branch dedicated to stopping the Dark Ones. Siebel began to add additional accounts to his operations, and to divert funds and resources. In an organization which was governed by secrecy, it was easy. Money and materiel began to flow into Siebel's private project, a project that was, as far as Siebel was concerned, much more important than anything the CIA had ever done before. A UV spotlight here, some ammunition there, a crate of grenades from somewhere else. Siebel soon managed to assemble a team of minion hunters and ensure that they would remain well supplied. He called his strike force Echo Wisdom, the code name of the mission he was on when he first learned of the Dark Ones.

These forces did manage to foil several Darkling plots, but for Siebel it was not enough. He felt that he had fielded a street gang to fight a problem that needed an army to defeat. He decided to build that army—1000 well trained, well-equipped empathic soldiers that would crush any Darkling activity that they could find.

Siebel did what he could to arrange the recruiting and funding of his army, and he did quite well. Unfortunately, the Dark Ones had their own agents, one of whom managed to slip into Siebel's organization. In

the end, this error cost Siebel and many of his followers their lives. The remaining members of Siebel's army went into hiding. Thanks to Siebel, they had the funding, equipment, and skills that they would need to continue their fight. Unfortunately, they lacked the manpower and, more importantly, a good leader.

Enter Robert Corbin, an ex-Reno detective, missing and presumed dead by the Reno, Nevada police department. Corbin had been recruited by Siebel after Echo Wisdom saved him from an insectoid ET brood chamber. He gathered up every member of Echo Wisdom that had survived the Darkling attack and began to plan the group's recovery.

Corbin proved himself to be an effective leader, and under his command, Echo Wisdom began to rebuild itself. It was decided that building a specialized army to fight the Darklings, as Siebel had attempted, was not a practical idea. To create a large group, recruiting had to be accomplished quickly, which would limit the amount of screening that could be done on each recruit—the flaw in Siebel's plan that ultimately led to his death.

Instead, their focus would turn away from the idea of attacking the Dark Ones as a large, organized force and, instead, act as a clearing house for information and an academy of sorts for minion hunter cadres. Under this plan, a few of the members of Echo Wisdom would stay with the core group to screen and instruct new recruits, but the majority would use the resources that Siebel had made available to the organization to create new identities for themselves, and then form small groups of minion hunters on their own. There would be ways they could communicate with other graduates of Echo Wisdom, but only in the most dire of circumstances would they ever meet with other graduates or with Corbin himself. Echo Wisdom would serve as a clearing house for information, intelligence gathering, and training.

This plan worked well, but the group still had problems. In the age of satellite surveillance, a group as large as Echo Wisdom cannot hope to hide in a remote area, and fading into the neighborhoods of a big city would not work much better. Corbin reasoned that the group would not be safe anywhere on Earth and decided to move the headquarters of Echo Wisdom into one of the proto-dimensions. Several possible proto-dimensions were scouted and ultimately the one labeled Delta Seven was chosen as the central site.



The Present

Today there are about 75 active "graduates" of the Echo Wisdom training program, each of which is fighting the Darklings, either as a lone wolf, or with a small group of non-Echo Wisdom-trained compatriots. Thanks to the groundwork laid by Siebel, these graduates have access to a large number of secret data services, high networking ratings in many communities (see **PC Booster Kit**, page 9), and (when necessary) access to the Intelligence & Analysis Unit (see below).

Delta Seven itself now serves two main functions:

- First, it serves as a safe haven for high-risk individuals. The most important of these is Dr. Marilyn Donnov (see page 84).

- Second, it serves as a secure headquarters for Echo Wisdom. Strategic meetings and planning sessions can be held in total safety. Intelligence can be examined, analyzed, and interpreted without having to worry about Darkling spies or saboteurs. Scientific study of interdimensional travel can be undertaken in relative safety.

Corbin has proven himself to be an able administrator. While he lacks the patriotism that drove Siebel, he makes up for it with a grim hatred for the Darklings. His experiences as a detective have left him highly suspicious and a bit cynical. The survivors of the Echo Wisdom massacre in which Siebel was killed consider him to be thorough and cautious, but most of the more recent Echo Wisdom recruits consider him a little paranoid. Anyone whom Corbin distrusted would probably think that the man was more than a little paranoid, perhaps even delusional.

The Darklings remain unaware of the existence of Delta Seven. Likewise, no character who is not a member of the Echo Wisdom force will know about it, and many members of Echo Wisdom have never been there. This is a reflection of how careful the group has been. It is, of course, still possible to arrive in the proto-dimension accidentally as a result of a Dimension Walk Catastrophic Failure.

To keep the secret of Delta Seven, a number of very stringent provisions are strictly enforced. No one may be brought to Delta Seven without a thorough background check and personal approval by Corbin himself. People with Dimension Walk skill are scrutinized especially closely. The only real way to keep Delta



Seven a secret is to restrict the number of dimension walkers who know how to get there (a daunting task, but not a completely impossible one). No folder pod or other piece of DarkTek that might get an empathic "fix" on Delta Seven's location can be allowed to leave. No captured Darkling or ET can be allowed in Delta Seven, and any that show up must be "neutralized."

The Citadel

The only building in Delta Seven, the Echo Wisdom Citadel, is a large underground structure which was designed to be very difficult to detect from the surface. Although its capacity is somewhat larger, it presently houses 147 people: 46 security specialists (33 Veterans, 13 Elite), 74 administrative staff (12 Elite, 9 Veteran, 20 Experienced and 33 Novice NPCs), and 27 scientific and technical staff (all Novices).

The building was constructed by non-empathic contract workers who were told they were working on a secret government project in British Columbia, and brought to the site by various ruses calculated to conceal their true destination. The building contains living quarters, classrooms, briefing rooms, power generation facilities, workshops, and countless other



facilities found at secret bases everywhere. The most important part of the Citadel, however, is the gigantic bank of computers and data processing equipment that forms the central brain of Echo Wisdom's Intelligence & Analysis Unit.

Every snippet of information Echo Wisdom gathers on the Darklings is sent to I&A, which confirms, collates, classifies, cross-compares, and analyzes it all. Headless cattle in Montana? Agriglyphs in Kansas? Strange lights at sea off Miami? What causes these things, and how do they relate to the epidemic of bloodless corpses in Indiana? The I&A Unit can provide answers.

Visiting Delta Seven

If a group of PCs enters Delta Seven, the personnel at the Citadel will be aware of the intrusion almost immediately—virtually all of the proto-dimension is blanketed by a state-of-the-art electronic surveillance network ("liberated" from a Tojicorp facility in Europe). A reconnaissance group will be sent out from the Citadel to scout the intruders. If necessary, reinforcements will be dispatched. In either case, the party will move as quickly as possible to capture every

intruder. The members of the recon group and any reinforcements are equipped with chameleon suits, optilinks, stun grenades, tear gas grenades, and tranquilizers and autoinjectors (as well as conventional firearms). They will attack in a very organized and professional manner, attempting to pick off the rearmost members of the group before the forward members are even aware that they are under attack.

Once captured, the prisoners will be sedated and taken as quickly as possible to another proto-dimension controlled by Echo Wisdom for questioning. All weapons and any DarkTek in the group's possession will be confiscated. If the group has a folder pod, it will be destroyed with very large demolition charges (after the group has been taken away). The purpose will be to prevent anyone (or anything) from getting a good fix on Delta Seven.

Once the PCs have revived, they will be intensively questioned about their background and their reasons for being where they are. Depending upon the appearance of the PCs and their weapons and equipment, the questioning may be low-key and friendly, or intensive and hostile depending upon how much of a threat the interrogation team believes the PCs represent. The presence of ET, rogue android or cyborg escapee characters will be taken as strong evidence that the PCs are nothing more than a party of Igors. As far as the Echo Wisdom forces are concerned, the PCs are guilty until proven innocent and have no rights—of course, given the decrepit state of the justice system back on Earth, that may not seem so out of the ordinary to them. Echo Wisdom's interrogators are not above using drugs, or even torture if they think that the PCs are lying to them or are holding out. In most cases, what will happen is that the PCs will be held captive until a thorough background check can be done on them; then, depending on what course of action seems best to Corbin, the party will either be executed, debriefed (have their memories of the events altered with a combination of drugs and psionic projections) and released, or be recruited for membership in Echo Wisdom if their record is good. Remember that Corbin has access to many information networks, and if the group has been active as minion hunters, he will probably be able to find it out. All he asks in exchange for access to Echo Wisdom's network is that the group keep his secret—the location of Delta Seven.

Dr. Marilyn Donnov

Consult the appendix on page 134 for a background history of Dr. Marilyn Donnov.

Dr. Donnov was brought to Delta Seven immediately after she left the hospital in Texas. The distinguished-looking woman who visited her there was an agent of Echo Wisdom, sent to convince the doctor of the grave danger she was in.

This woman managed to convince Dr. Donnov that her only hope for survival was to allow Echo Wisdom to hide her, and Dr. Donnov agreed. A CIA-trained operative took her place and laid a false trail to Arizona, where one of the Echo Wisdom-led anti-Darkling groups stands ready to deal with any Dark Minion seeking the doctor.

From Delta Seven, Dr. Marilyn Donnov now heads a small research team exploring the details of trans-dimensional physics. The team conducts numerous experiments, but always under the strictest security, and always in proto-dimensions other than Delta Seven (Dr. Donnov knows only too well what can happen when something goes wrong). The team is aware of the work being done in this field by Drs. Tover and Sonoda, but their own conclusions are kept secret.



ECHO WISDOM AS AN EMPATHIC CELL

Echo Wisdom

Goals: Trainers and Information Brokers

Methods: Shadows

Empathic Philosophy: Psionic

Organization: Dictatorial

Assets: Superior

Size: 200+ members

Level of Activity: High

Relations with ETs: The members of Echo Wisdom understand exactly what has happened to the ETs and see them as victims. However, they do not see that as a good reason to take unnecessary chances. While individual members might help renegade ETs, the location of Delta Seven will never be revealed to one, nor will any be taken there.

Relations with Other Cells: Echo Wisdom cells do not always realize they are Echo Wisdom cells—many times only one or two key members of a cell will be Echo Wisdom-trained. Cells with a good record will be given information, but Siebel's original "trust no one" principle operates here as well.

Headquarters: Delta Seven proto-dimension

Generating Echo Wisdom Characters

Referees may decide to allow players to create characters who are graduates of the Echo Wisdom training academy. They should be very cautious about doing this, however. The organization is very careful to not choose anyone who cannot be trusted to act with discretion and would not be above "eliminating" graduates who have gone rogue. Echo Wisdom characters may not identify themselves as such to anyone other than another member of Echo Wisdom. Depending on the referee and the individual players, the referee might wish to take the individual player aside and generate the character in private.

To get into the Echo Wisdom program, the PC must pass the entry requirements *and* roll a foreign contact while in one of the following careers (this represents being contacted by Echo Wisdom): National Military Academy, Astronaut, Federal Law Enforcement, Government Agent, Psychic Test Subject, State/Local Law Enforcement, Underground Empath, or Empathic Study (Psionic). Characters who have spent one or more terms as a Criminal, Cyborg Escapee, Gambler, Prisoner, Rogue Android and/or any of the Renegade ET careers will not be allowed in the organization. After graduating from Echo Wisdom, the Cyborg Escapee career is no longer an option—Echo Wisdom graduates are expected to kill themselves before allowing themselves to be captured by the Dark Ones.

Note that being an Echo Wisdom graduate does not mean that the character knows the location of Delta Seven (indeed, once they develop Dimension Walk skill, it is very unlikely they will ever be taken there).

Entry: Intelligence 5+, Empathy 2+.

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills during the first term with Echo Wisdom: Small Arms 2, Demolitions 1, Observation 1, Stealth 2, Psionic Telepathy 1.

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of any seven levels from any one or a combination of the following: Any psionic skill, Small Arms, Demolitions, Disguise, Interrogation, Medical, Observation, Stealth, Tracking, Willpower.

Contacts: Graduates get no contacts during their terms with Echo Wisdom. However, they may add 2 to any networking die roll they make. (See PC Booster Kit, page 9)

Special: Echo Wisdom recruits are not allowed any secondary activities. Graduates of Echo Wisdom do not get any starting money but can occasionally raise large sums of cash quickly. This ability will disappear if it is abused.



GEHENNA: THE DOMAIN OF FLAME



Name: Gehenna
Type: Halfland
Discontinuity: 2
Assimilation Effect Value: 0

Gehenna is the proto-dimensional reflection of fire. In its confines eternal fires rage. Rivers of lava, fountains of flame, and deserts of embers are a regular natural phenomenon here. When the local equivalent to weather gets bad, firestorms (hot enough in their cores to fuse glass) whip across the land. Fire in Gehenna is either unhindered by a need for fuel or else it burns the atmosphere itself. While this would seem to indicate that there is some sort of physics shift operating in Gehenna, it does not seem to effect Earthly flames. A match lit in Gehenna flares up and eventually burns out. Whatever physics shift takes place in Gehenna, it does not seem to be fatal—as

simulated humans take no damage (from the physics shift, anyway).

Gehenna is a halfland with a discontinuity of 2. Of the proto-dimensions a PC might want to travel to, Gehenna is certainly the least hospitable. While not as deadly as the fragmentary proto-dimensions of raw elemental fire which sorcerers tap into to perform their various empathic feats, survival for any length of time in the furnaces of Gehenna is virtually impossible.

Out of the Frying Pan

The first thing that any PC in Gehenna will notice is the oppressive heat. The coolest it gets anywhere in Gehenna is 150° Fahrenheit (66° Celsius), a little cooler than in an Earthly sauna. In most regions, however, the temperature is higher. Characters who do not take precautions to protect themselves from the heat will, after 15 minutes in Gehenna, begin to suffer its effects. Every 15 minutes, characters must pass a Difficult: Constitution task. If they succeed, they take 1D6 points of damage to the chest and their Constitution is temporarily reduced by 1 point. If they fail, they will collapse and begin to lose 1 point of Constitution per minute until they die or something is done to remove them from the heat. Lost Constitution is

recovered at a rate of 1 point per hour whenever the character is in a cool place. Having a steady supply of water (at least one liter for every half hour) will make the Constitution test one level easier. Some sort of artificial environment will eliminate the effects of the heat, but there are limitations to the utility of such techniques (see "Equipment," page 89).

Next, the smell of the place will assault their senses. While the atmosphere in Gehenna is oxygen rich (a fact which seems to help support the eternal fires here), it is not, by any means, pleasant. Instead, it is filled with smoke, bits of ash, and the stench of sulfur dioxide. This will cause the characters eyes to sting and water, making their vision a little blurry. Wearing some sort of eye protection to keep the smoke out will reduce the effect, but after the characters start to sweat—and they will sweat in Gehenna—they will begin to have trouble with condensation on the lenses. Because of this, any character who is not in a full environment suit will suffer some vision penalties. Any task which requires clear vision, such as firing a weapon at a distant target or reading a small display on an instrument, will either be one level more difficult or, in the case of tasks which are not hit/miss, will take twice as long as normal.

After the heat and the smoke, other aspects of Gehenna will become apparent. The sky is overcast and dark and will remind the characters of Earthly skies just prior to a terrible storm.

The difference is that while stormy skies on Earth are a deep blue, these skies are an oppressive grey without a hint of any other color. If there is a sun shining on the other side of that blanket of smoke and haze, it cannot be seen from the ground.

The ground doesn't look any more pleasant than the sky. It appears as an endless plain of dark colored, jagged rocks, broken up by flows of lava and walls of flame. The ground is made of ash and cinders mixed with bits of shattered pumice, too large to be thought of as sand, too small to be called stones. This material is insidious and pervasive. It will cause mechanical devices exposed to it (especially those with lots of moving parts) to eventually malfunction or break down. Vehicles with rubber tires will not get very far in it, and characters who are not wearing some sort of high-topped boot or shoe will find the stuff getting into their footwear with annoying regularity. Outcroppings



of cracked and jagged granite regularly break through this charred terrain and pose an additional hazard to vehicular travel.

Terrain and Obstacles

In addition to the gritty plains of ash and cinder, there are other items of terrain regularly found in Gehenna.

Rivers: Every so often the fields of Gehenna are split by rivers of lava. Sometimes these are wide and lazy, other times they are fairly narrow and fast-moving. In either case, these rivers are very hot, and any unprotected characters near them will take damage. Characters standing within 10 meters of the banks of these rivers will take damage as if they were within the primary burst radius of a WP explosion, and should refer to the rule on WP fragments (*Dark Conspiracy*, pages 97-99).

It is virtually impossible to cross these rivers without some sort of special preparation. Steel will melt after a minute or two in contact with the lava, and the skirts of a hovercraft will be destroyed by the heat after a short time. Falling into such a river would be certain death. Any character who falls into a river of lava should take 5D6 points of damage every second to every body part. Normal armor will not prevent this effect, although sealed suits will protect the user for 1D6+2 seconds before being destroyed.

Going around a river of lava is not impossible. They usually spew out of the ground at a fiery spring and either re-enter the terrain or fade to a trickle after a few kilometers.

Fountains: Another common feature found in Gehenna are geysers or fountains of fire. These blazes are usually small (a meter or so in diameter) goutts of flame that burst out of the ground, burn intensely for a few minutes, and then fade out almost as quickly as they appear.

The fountains are not targeted in any way, but are instead a completely natural phenomenon. Still, there is a one in six chance per hour that a group of PCs will have a fountain of fire erupt near them. If this occurs, referees should pick a point near the center of the party, roll 1D10 to determine the distance from that point that the fountain will erupt from, and then roll a second D10 to determine the direction (as per the *Dark Conspiracy* scatter rules). Being caught in the fountain is equivalent to being covered by burning





gasoline (see *Dark Conspiracy* pages 97-98), and being within a meter of one does 1D6 points of damage per five seconds.

Even if the initial die roll indicates that no fountain of fire appears near the characters, referees should periodically inform the players that they can see a fountain erupt nearby.

Referees should use their imaginations to add other terrain features representative of the extreme heat (such as pools of molten metal or steaming cracks in the ground) to any description of Gehenna.

Wall of Flame: These conflagrations are the tracks left behind by the hellfires which wander throughout the proto-dimension. Crossing the walls is not too difficult. They are usually two meters wide, although there is some variation in this figure. Crossing through a wall of fire does the same type of damage as being in a burning building or grass fire. The walls seem to burn out after a while and will be completely gone after 2D10 minutes, so PCs who are not in a hurry can wait them out.

Besides the danger of the flames, there are two other hazards involved with a wall of fire. First, it is difficult to see through one. A careless character could walk straight off of a cliff or into a river of lava. Attempts to peer through a wall of fire require a Formidable: Observation roll. If the character is passing through the wall, there is less flame that he or she must look through and the task becomes Difficult unless the character is moving at top speed, in which case it is still Formidable.

The second danger is that at one end of a wall of flame, there is a hellfire...

Life in Gehenna

Periodically there are small tufts of plant life growing out of the ground. The plants do not possess leaves as such and are of an ashen gray color. The wood from these plants is exceedingly strong, so harvesting a piece for experimentation is a little difficult. The wood will not burn independently, but in the flame of a cutting torch it will be reduced to ash. How these plants survive in Gehenna (indeed, how any life survives in Gehenna) is a mystery.

Gehenna is home to the creatures known as hellfires (*Dark Races*, page 48). Whether the creatures originated here or were put here by one of the Dark Lords

is unknown. Perhaps Gehenna was once a green and vibrant world before they made it the scorched and blasted inferno that it is today.

Hellfires: Unlike hellfires encountered on Earth, the hellfires found in Gehenna do not have to worry about an immediate demise. Fire can burn on forever in this strange proto-dimension. This makes fighting a hellfire even more unpleasant than on Earth for two reasons:

First, firefighting equipment only does half the damage in Gehenna that it would do to them on Earth.

Second, since hellfires do not have to concern themselves with finding additional fuel to sustain their existence, they can afford to be much more cavalier in their cat-and-mouse games with their victims. If a hellfire is reasonably sure that the characters it is fighting cannot seriously harm it, it will never quite move in for the kill, but rather chase the characters.

The only effective weapons against the hellfires in Gehenna are the empathic abilities described in *Dark Races* (pages 48-49), the sorcerous Change Environment (Special) ability (which does damage to the hellfires in the same way it does other targets), and the psionic power of Cryokinesis (the latter two described in *Empathic Sourcebook*). Of these methods of attack, Cryokinesis is certainly the most effective. Basic Success causes the hellfire considerable pain and will repel it. Stage Two success will do 1D6 points of damage. Stage Three will do 2D6. Stage Four will do 4D6. Stage Five does 8D6, and Stage Six will kill the creature instantaneously.

Change Environment (Special) damages the hellfire by hurling a blast of extreme cold (instead of fire or lightning). Like Cryokinesis, Basic Success causes the hellfire considerable pain and will repel it; Stage Two does 1D6, and so on.

Because of the danger that Cryokinesis and Change Environment (Special) spells pose to them, hellfires will always do their best to kill any character who exhibits either ability.

Obsidian People: Besides the hellfires, there is another race of creatures who live in Gehenna. They appear as completely hairless, obsidian black humanoids. They are usually dressed in simple clothing which looks as if it were made from some sort of metallic fiber. Their statistics (see sidebar) are similar to those of the dark elves, but instead of the Dimension Walk skill, they possess the Pyrokinesis skill. These



humanoids do not seem to be affected by the intense heat of Gehenna at all, and will not be injured by such weapons as flamethrowers or thermite grenades.

Little is known about these creatures, as they will seek to avoid encounters with the PCs. If the PCs force the issue, they will attack. In combat they will either use Pyrokinesis or fight with jagged knives and a weapon which resembles the DarkTek Bolter. If characters get a chance to inspect this weapon closely, it will look more like a weapon of human design that has become half-melted than a piece of semi-organic DarkTek. It is an Average: Intelligence task for human PCs to fire this weapon, but it is impossible for humans to reload it once its five-

round magazine is empty. The Obsidian people certainly know how to reload it, but they aren't telling.

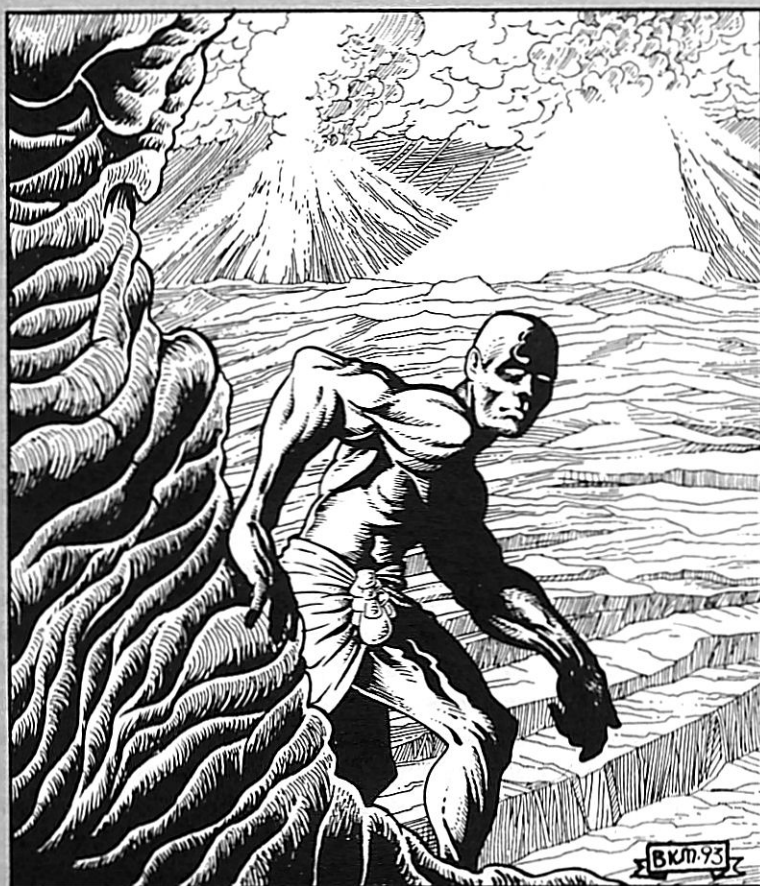
It is virtually impossible to get information from the Obsidian people. They seem to prefer suicide to surrender and will flee if they feel outnumbered. Because of this, it is unknown whether they are masters, servants, allies, or enemies of the hellfires.

Equipment

Equipment designed to function in normal Earthly environments will not last long in Gehenna. Electronics and internal combustion engines and other devices (such as the ice box from **DarkTek**, page 45) which

can be affected by temperature will overheat and cease to operate after 1D6 hours unless they have been specially modified (a Difficult task versus Mechanic, Electronics, or whatever the referee thinks relevant depending upon the equipment involved).

In addition to this, the all-pervasive grit and ash that makes up the ground is highly abrasive and will get into any device that isn't somehow shielded. The effects of this are variable, but the more precise a piece of equipment is and the more exposed its moving parts, the quicker it will break down. An internal combustion engine will have its air filter clogged in about an hour, but will only last about 10 minutes if it is operated without an air filter. Referees may wish to implement a jamming roll each time an automatic or semiautomatic is fired to represent this grit clogging the action. Referees should not be overly harsh with this effect, but should make sure that characters remain aware of the problem.

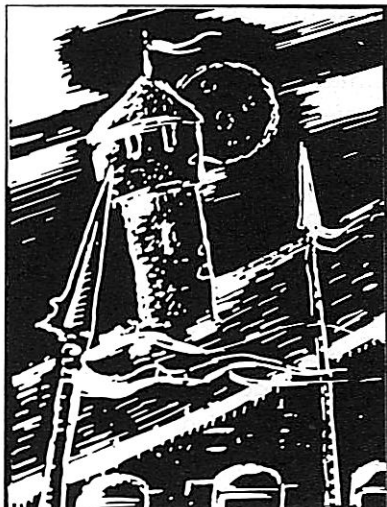


Obsidian People

Strength: 6	Education: 4	Move: 3/10/20/35
Constitution: 4	Charisma: 4	Skill/Dam.: 7/4
Intelligence: 5	Initiative: 4	# Appear: 2D6
Special: Pyrokinesis.		



GOthic



Name: Gothic
Type: Halfland
Discontinuity: 2 (Sticky)
Assimilation Effect Value: 0

Gothic is a proto-dimensional reflection of the ideal of a castle from a Gothic romance novel, hence the nickname. It is a halfland with a discontinuity of 2, although it is important to note that there it is a more difficult task to leave Gothic than to enter it (see "The Way Out," below). At first, characters who come to Gothic might consider it to be a haven, or even a potential base. Gradually, however, their opinions will change.

The players' first view of Gothic will be deceptively placid. So much so that it might be in the referee's interest to emphasize the abundant luxuries there in order to make the PCs' discovery of the flaw in Gothic's storybook

atmosphere seem all the worse.

When the PCs arrive in Gothic, they will appear in a large feast hall, something right out of a movie or a novel by Sir Walter Scott. Enormous tables are loaded with food of every description—great platters of roasts, steaks, chops, cutlets, serving trays heaped with roast chickens, ducks, and geese, bowls of vegetables (cooked and raw), huge tureens of soups, stews, gravies, platters piled high with bread of every description, pots of butter, jam, jelly, and marmalade in a hundred colors and flavors, fruit pies, meat pies, pastries, ice cream (perpetually cold, of course), complex confections made out of marzipan; you name it, it's there on the table, looking (and smelling) as appetizing as imaginable.

There are places set, along each side of the tables, and the dining hall could easily hold 100 revelers or more. Wine has been poured, portions of food served, and a fire crackles merrily in a fireplace big enough to roast an ox. The room is brightly lit by dozens of thick white-wax candles in candelabra on the tables and in a huge brass chandelier overhead. Everything seems in readiness for a feast, but there is not a soul about.

If the PCs examine the place settings more closely, they will discover two interesting facts: First, some of the plates have been used; there are half-eaten servings of meat and crusts of bread, and the occasional stained napkin. Second, the food is still warm. Obviously, wherever the diners went, they could not have left very long ago. In actuality, there are no other living things here, nor have there ever been. There is only the giant castle, the uninhabited rooms, and the empty suits of armor which stand in niches along the walls.

Explorations

The architecture is what one would expect from a medieval castle found on Earth (again, as imagined by movies and novels)—pointed archways, heavy wooden doors, and thick, iron-bound shutters over the high, narrow windows. Swords, shields, and heraldic banners decorate the walls of the feast hall, and two suits of ornate plate armor repose in small alcoves on either side of the enormous fireplace, one holding a seven-foot-long halberd, the other holding a huge two-handed axe.

If the PCs open the main doors, they will see a torchlit hallway that extends for hundreds of yards, lined with more suits of armor, each in a narrow niche in the granite block walls. At the far end of the corridor is a broad, circular room, hung with tapestries, weapons, and the heads of stags and boar. A vast, dark staircase spirals up from this room, and further heavy doors open onto other shadowy rooms of the castle. Sconces every few meters along the walls hold torches that provide illumination instead of candles.

The PCs can explore in this manner for a while, before discovering the most interesting thing about this castle: It has no exits. Every single door the characters find leads into another room or a corridor. If the PCs open one of the shuttered windows, it will not open onto the outside, but only into another room. The entire proto-dimension is castle; there is no "outside" there.

The rooms and hallways of Gothic extend (seemingly) forever in every direction. In fact, the very space of the proto-dimension is coiled in upon itself. Rooms can and do "overlap," and if an attempt is made to map the castle in the normal three-dimensional fashion, however, it will become very obvious to the mapper that something is terribly wrong. Feast halls, throne



rooms, bedrooms, kitchens, studies, trophy rooms, dungeon cells, secret passages—each chamber and hallway in Gothic is, in actuality, a separate “thread” of real three-dimensional space “balled up” in a multidimensional matrix. In a few places, the closure is frighteningly close: It is possible to climb out a window on one side of a room, only to be found climbing in through a window on the opposite side of the same room.

For Whom The Bell Tolls

During the party's stay in Gothic, at 15-minute intervals, a bell will clang with a deep resonating tone, as if a nearby clock tower were striking the quarter-hour (think of Big Ben). No matter where the PCs go, or how diligently they search, they will never be able to find the clock. The chime is a natural effect of Gothic, and looking for it will be about as profitable as looking for the mechanism that makes the sun rise in the east.

Every hour, on the hour, the disembodied clock will strike 12 (no matter what time it really is). As the twelfth chime sounds, the suits of armor which line the walls will come to life.

Slowly and haltingly, the suits of armor will creak and clank to life, like sleepers awakening from a deep slumber. Suits will step forward, and empty helms will turn slowly, scanning the passageways and rooms with unfathomable senses. Gradually, they will determine that something is not right. There are intruders here. Intruders which must be destroyed...

The armors will move randomly at first, but after a few minutes, the ones nearest the PCs will have located them. The armors are inimical to any intruder and will try to destroy anything which is not native to Gothic—a category which the PCs neatly fit into. Once a few suits have engaged the adventurers in combat, others will be drawn by the commotion. The armors are slow, but they are very strong. They will not seem very bright individually, nor will they seem well organized.

The armor will stay active for 15 minutes, until the bell rings out the first quarter past the hour. At this time, the armors will, all at the same moment, break off their attack and docilely fall back a few yards, at which point they will shimmer and vanish. If the PCs are near an alcove, it will be filled before their eyes by a materializing suit of armor, now immobile again.

Damaged or “wounded” armors, and pieces lying on the floor will vanish, and reassemble themselves in the nearest alcove.

A Man's Home Is His Castle

Making even a temporary base in this proto-dimension is problematical at best. Food and drink are easily available, and shelter isn't a consideration in Gothic—there is no weather to need shelter from. The real problem is that the animate armors will seek to kill all outsiders for 15 minutes out of every hour. This will certainly interrupt any plans the PCs may have concerning the R&R potential of Gothic.

Attempts to disable the suits of armor will work; but only for a limited time. Bolting the armor to the stone walls of Gothic will hold them still, but after a few minutes, they will begin to use their swords, halberds, and axes to cut themselves free. This process may take two or even three activation periods, but the armors are relentless, and they have all the time in the world. Temporary protection can be had by bracing the feast hall tables across doorways in a dead-end room. The oak planks are heavy and hard, and it will certainly take more than 15 minutes for an armor to chop through. However, tables do not heal, and the next time the armors come, the PCs had better have another plan ready.

Even PCs who are prepared for what awaits them in Gothic will eventually run into trouble. An inch-thick steel plate will stop the armors for hundreds of activation periods, but the armors do not get frustrated, just more and more cunning. Given time, they will think of a new way to get to the PCs—sliding down the chimneys, climbing up the shaft within a garderobe, even using battering rams to break down the walls between adjacent rooms. They are without feeling, without any sense of self-preservation, and they will never stop the continuous cycle of attack/dormancy.

The Dark Secret

The suits of armor are possessed by creatures which are very much like the entropic gremlins (*Dark Races*, pages 44-45), although there are several differences between the two. While entropic gremlins seek to feed and usually only attack if they or their continued food source is threatened, the armors automatically attack to kill no matter what the PCs have



done. Likewise, the periods of dormancy, the fact that they will only possess the suits of armor, and that these suits never seem to be damaged by the gremlins' habitation are all at odds with the entropic gremlins' usual behavior. If taken to another proto-dimension, these factors evaporate and the armors will start to behave as Earthly suits of armor which have been possessed by entropic gremlins. Soon there will be nothing left of them but rust and their inhabitants will have found new, albeit temporary, homes.

This implies that the armors are not a different type of beastie from the entropic gremlins, but rather that the suits are possessed by entropic gremlins which are, somehow, affected by some sort of physics shift. The exact nature of this shift is unknown, though, and it does not seem to effect humans, or anything else which is not native to Gothic. Apparently the gremlins never ruin the armor for the same reason that the food on the tables never spoils, or even gets cold. Entropy is flexible, flowing first one way, and then another for the inhabitants of this proto-dimension. Like the feast

tables for humans in Gothic, the suits of armor provide an inexhaustible banquet for the entropic gremlins.

The reasons for the dematerialization/rematerialization, and the 15-minute/45-minute cycle remain a mystery, but since neither occurs when an armor is removed from Gothic, it is clear that both are linked to Gothic in some way.

The Way Out

If the PCs arrived by folder pod, they are in trouble. Folderpods, as well as any other semi-organic DarkTek, will eventually be recognized as a living creature by the armors, and will be attacked by them after an activation period or two has passed. Although folder pods have some combat ability, they will be no match for a concentrated attack by a group of armors. If the folder pod is destroyed, the PCs may have no method of escape left to them. If the PCs are travelling empathically, they will not have to worry about their mode of transport being killed by the armors—well, at least not as much...

In either case, if a group of PCs actually becomes trapped in Gothic, only a miracle will save them. Perhaps Darklings come to Gothic occasionally to harvest entropic gremlins. Maybe a group of dark elves come here to steal the beautiful armor, furniture or artworks to decorate their own decadent citadels. Alternatively, another group of minion hunters might arrive, just in time, and rescue the PCs. Conversely, the second group of minion hunters might just as easily be rescued by the PCs if they are unaware of the unique properties of Gothic.

Escape from Gothic is more difficult than entering the proto-dimension. This is because Gothic is what some dimension walkers call a "sticky" proto-dimension. Entering it is only as difficult as entering a proto-dimension with a discontinuity of 2, but leaving it is a much harder task. It is always one level more difficult for humans to leave Gothic than the Dimension Walk Difficulty Table indicates.

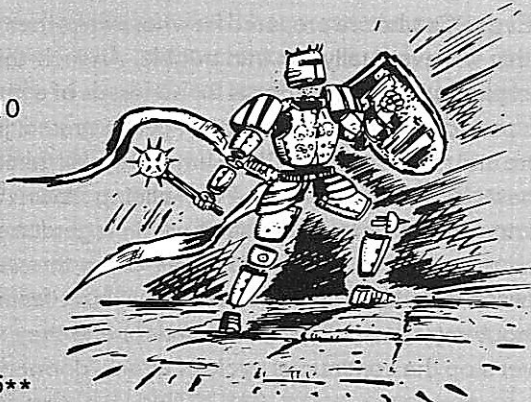
For example, if Cassandra wanted to travel from Gothic to Earth, which would normally be a Difficult: Dimension Walk task, she would find it a Formidable task instead. Entering Gothic from Earth would still be an Impossible task.

Once the PCs have been to Gothic, they will suffer a few lingering effects. Any character who has been to Gothic will be subject to nightmares involving pursuit

ARMORS

Although entropic gremlins are covered in *Dark Races* Volume I, their statistics are quite variable. Below are the relevant stats for animate armors in Gothic.

Strength: 15
 Constitution: 10
 Agility: 4
 Intelligence: 6
 Education: 3
 Charisma: 1
 Empathy: 5
 Initiative: 2
 Move: 6/6
 # Appear: 1D6**
 Hits: 15/30*
 Skill/Dam.: 6/1D6+STR (halberd, sword, or two-handed axe)



*Animate armors have an armor value of 1 to all hit locations.
 ** Within 100 meters of any point in Gothic, there will only be 1D6 of the niches which house the suits of armors during their rest phase, many more of them will be seeking out any invading life forms in Gothic while they are active.



for a number of days equal to 1D10 minus the character's Willpower. Characters with the Dimension Walk skill who fail an Average test of Empathy will be drawn back to Gothic by these dreams some time during this period of nightmares.

Adventures Using Gothic

In terms of its purpose in a campaign setting, Gothic is a trap waiting to be sprung. It is an ideal "encounter" proto-dimension, for those times when a PC wants to dimension walk and the referee has no particular plans for that activity, or in those cases where a Catastrophic Failure with dimension walk has sent the PCs somewhere other than to their target dimension. A visit with the animate armors will convince neophyte PCs that interdimensional travel should not be undertaken lightly.

Having once escaped from the trap, what could induce PCs to return to it? The reasons against using Gothic as a sanctuary or base should be readily apparent. The tangled nature of three-dimensional space in Gothic is interesting, but it is hardly useful to minion hunters. Gothic has little to offer, apart from an unending supply of food, in the way of material resources, unless the PCs can find a way to train entropic gremlins. The furniture, wall-hangings, curtains, candlesticks, and the countless other accouterments of Gothic are real, and will continue to exist if removed, but the PC will not be able to make much money selling them: While in Gothic they appear luxurious and finely crafted, they will turn cheap and shoddy if transported elsewhere. Gold candlesticks will turn out to be brass-plated tin, swords and battle-axes will turn out to be pot-metal, and the fine furniture, nothing but cheap veneer and fiber-board. The food will turn into edible (and nourishing), but appallingly unappetizing fare.

Gothic will most likely make repeat appearances in a campaign in one of two ways—as a prison, or as a refuge. Just because the PCs will not return to Gothic on their own does not mean that they will never wind up there again. Darklings with the ability to dimension walk might decide to strand the PCs in Gothic, counting on the armors to eliminate them as a threat. Alternatively, the PCs might do the same thing to a Darkling whom they could not physically or empathically defeat directly.



Although the PCs will not consider Gothic to be any sort of refuge, a Dark Minion might. Any Darkling capable of resisting the animate armors might decide to set up shop in Gothic, finding it an ideal place to hide from prying humans. A Darkling who could control and direct the armors might find Gothic to be the perfect lair from which to launch its evil machinations. Safe in the labyrinth of this twisted proto-dimension, isolated by the armors from any organic intruders, it could direct an endless supply of entropic gremlins toward Earth, to cause havoc.

If the PCs have had previous encounters with Gothic and hear of an upsurge in the entropic gremlin population, they will probably have a suspicion of where the things are coming from, and know that only they, with their knowledge and experience, have a chance of stopping the spreading evil.



GRAY: A LAND OF SHADOWS

The instant the PCs arrive in Gray, they will notice the most significant difference between the proto-dimension and Earth—*everything* here is a shade of the same cold, flat gray. A bright gray sun shines the gray sky. Gray trees grow in a gray park. A gray dog barks while gray children play catch with a gray ball in a field of gray grass. A gray ice cream man hawks his gray wares.

The effect is not just a surface condition. A book found in Gray will hold page after page of indecipherable gray printing barely visible on the gray paper pages within its gray cover. A gray fried egg has two distinctly separate parts, just like an Earthly fried egg, but both of them are gray.

Inhabitants of Gray are identical to human beings in every aspect except they are entirely gray—their skin, their hair, their eyes. If they are injured, they will bleed gray blood.

After the initial shock, the PCs will discover other anomalies. The gray world is silent. Not the silence of a peaceful woods or serene mountain top, but complete and absolute silence. The only noise the PCs will hear in gray is the noise they, themselves make. The characters will notice that their sense of smell still works properly and Gray garbage will smell just as rank as the garbage of Earth. The sense of taste would also work here, were it not for another feature of Gray.

Strangers in a Very Strange Land

While the PCs will see the locals of Gray as animated gray forms, none of them will seem to notice the PCs, no matter what they do to attract attention to themselves. Speaking to one of the greys or waving a hand right in front of their face will elicit no effect. The PCs aren't merely being ignored—the greys simply cannot see them.

Insubstantiality: Trying to gently tap one of the gray people on the back will reveal that the effect goes

beyond effects of vision. Any PCs who try will find their hand moving effortlessly though the Gray human's body. There will be no apparent ill effect caused by this action, either for the PC or for the Gray human. In fact, they will find it difficult to touch anything. If they bend down to pick a gray rock off the ground, it slips through their fingers, or more accurately, their fingers slip through it. Like a sorcerer who is using the Phase skill, a PC in Gray may walk through walls but is barred by stairs and elevators. Presumably, the ground in Gray supports them for the same reason that phasing sorcerers do not sink into the Earth, but no one can say for sure. In any case, PCs on Gray will be frustrated at their inability to walk anywhere but the first floor. In a Gray city, they will find themselves up to their ankles in sidewalk, and when they walk through a wall to enter a building, they will find themselves up to their knees in the building's foundation (assuming the building doesn't have a basement).

If characters do a little experimentation, they will notice an odd effect of their insubstantiality. While they can pass their hand through a solid object, like a brick wall, they will notice a slight sensation of drag, as if moving it through liquid mud. If they swing their arm at the tree as fast as they can, it will be almost like punching the real thing. A little experimentation (a Difficult: Observation test if none of the players is picking up on the phenomenon) reveals that the more force in a movement, the more substantial the gray object it connects with feels. To a crawling character, a gray brick wall is not an obstacle. To a walking character, it will feel like walking through mud, and perceptibly slow the character's movement. To a running character, it will hit hard enough to cause bruises. By running in place, a character can stay on top of dense substances like concrete, but this can be very tiring after a while. Standing still will result in the character sinking to ground level. This can be a shock in buildings with a basement—the character will slip through the floor, then fall normally to the ground, hitting hard enough to do damage.

What this ultimately means is that it is impossible to be subtle in Gray. Opening a book which is laying on a table is impossible, but knocking it to the floor can easily be done. Do anything short of assaulting one of Gray's inhabitants and he is as insubstantial as a



phantom. A punch or kick will hit the Gray person with the force of a solid blow. Try to leave an Earthly coin on a Gray table and it falls to the floor (actually, through the floor to the ground). Hurling an Earthly coin at a table with all your might will cause it to bounce off, and firing a .45 caliber slug at the table will leave a small hole with bits of gray sawdust on the floor.

The Gray inhabitants experience the same effects when dealing with creatures from dimensions other than Gray. A child of Gray could walk right through a PC and never notice the collision. A Gray person driving a car at interstate speeds will notice the collision, probably even stop and get out of the car to look around, but will never notice the crumpled form of the adventurer laying on the ground.

Because of this, damage from fire combat and falls remains unchanged. Melee combat damage is reduced by half (round fractions down).

Empathy in Gray: Most empathic skills function perfectly well in Gray, but certain ones will not function at all, or only with a limited success if they are targeted at something which is native to Gray. Empathic skills which directly effect a material object (such as Pyrokinesis or Telekinesis) will work, but at two levels below whatever stage of success the referee rolled for the attempt. If a Basic Success or Stage Two was rolled, there is no effect to the target at all. Empathic tasks which involve directly affecting the mind of one of Gray's inhabitants will automatically fail. For example, it is impossible to use Project Thought to inform a Gray human of a Earth human's presence, although it would be possible for two Earth humans to maintain empathic contact.

It should be noted that while it is impossible to influence the minds of the people of Gray, it is no more difficult to use the Human Empathy skill to read their minds than it would to read another PC's mind. Likewise, Gray empaths cannot directly effect a PC or Darkling's mind but they could read them—that is if they had some reason to scan what appears as an empty space to them.

Establishing Contact

If an empathic adventurer can manage to convince an empath of Gray to read his or her thoughts, a crude form of communication can be established. It should be noted that each participant in such an exchange must continually manage a Stage Four success for

effective communication to be maintained. Stage Two and Three successes may get basic ideas across, but there is a great deal of possibility for misunderstanding. Also, since there does not seem to be an organized community of empaths in the Gray proto-dimension, most Gray empaths do not have very high skill levels, or even a clear idea of the skills they possess. They are as likely to believe they are going insane as to believe they are mentally communicating with a person from another dimension.

Since legends of ghosts exist in the Gray proto-dimension, characters should be careful of how they decide to attract local attention. They could find themselves being exorcised by a local priest (an entirely futile gesture thanks to the limitations of empathic interaction between humans and Gray's inhabitants) instead of achieving a successful parley.

If a party brings something from Gray back to Earth (an impressive feat, since it is virtually impossible to handle anything from Gray), it will find that its behavior on Earth is exactly like the behavior of Earthly material in Gray. It will remain intangible except if handled in the roughest way and will fade from sight during the interdimensional transfer. If a Gray human were to come to Earth, his or her experiences would exactly mimic an Earth human's experience in Gray.





Darklings in Gray

The Darklings are not very active in Gray. While it is easy to attack and even kill the inhabitants, most Darklings find it to lack the satisfaction which their games with humans on Earth provide. Since most creatures from other dimensions cannot touch the inhabitants of Gray, Darklings who feed on human flesh are almost never encountered here—they certainly can't consume the Greys. The Darklings which feed empathically also have difficulties in gaining any sustenance from the locals, although there are some which can circumvent the limitations of the proto-dimensions.

The most common type of Darkling to be found in Gray is the Boogey Man. This creature operates in Gray in almost exactly the same way as it would on Earth, repeatedly causing fear in its victims until they are emotionally drained, then killing them.

There are two unusual things about the Boogey Man's behavior in Gray. Its empathic abilities do not seem at all hampered by the effects which limit human empathic abilities—it can use its Telekinesis as well in Gray as it can on Earth. Also, its corporeal and incorporeal states are reversed for Gray humans and Earth humans. For example, if an Earth human, a Gray human, and a Boogey Man are all in the same room, the Boogey Man will always appear as a corporeal entity to one of the other two. If it appeared corporeal to the Earth human, but then shifted to its incorporeal form, it would then appear corporeal to the Gray human.

Because of this limitation, humans have a great advantage at hunting a Boogey Man in Gray. The creature cannot run around in its incorporeal form to avoid the humans since that would expose it to attack from the inhabitants of Gray. As a result, a Boogey Man will always seek to kill any human it encounters in Gray.

Assimilation: There is no damage associated with assimilation to Gray. At the referee's option, a form of complete assimilation could take place, where the PCs and their equipment assimilate to Gray and lose their color. Anything or anyone assimilated in this way, of course, would be unable to interact with an unassimilated human, but would suddenly find themselves able to be seen, heard, and felt normally by the inhabitants of Gray. They would, of course, not understand the language, and will soon be classified as mentally deficient.





HADES: LAND OF THE FORGETFUL DEAD

Hades is a halfland with a discontinuity of 1 and a rather unusual physics shift. There is no assimilation damage associated with Hades, but there are other very dangerous effects as will be explained shortly.

Arrivals

The first time the PCs arrive in Hades, they will be ankle-deep in water facing what appears to be a giant tropical island. Warm seawater laps around their ankles, and the air is full of rich, sweet smells. It is slightly warm, but a gentle breeze constantly blows so that, rather than feeling muggy, it is very comfortable. Birds can be heard in the distance, both out over the water and from inside the light jungle that starts a few dozen meters up the warm, white, sandy beach.

Far off, three snow-covered mountain tops can be seen reaching up into the sky. Between these and the coast are a series of smaller and smaller hills, clearly wooded. Several streams and rivers carry the melt water from these peaks to the sea.

It always seems to be late afternoon in Hades. The sun hangs low in the western sky, about 20° above the horizon, not yet ready to set, but with most of its fierce brightness diminished. The full moon sits at about the same altitude in the east. Thanks to the fixed positions of these two bodies, it is virtually impossible to get lost on the island that is Hades.

Meeting the Locals

Not too long after arriving on the island of Hades, the PCs will be greeted by one of the locals. He is a tall, deeply tanned human male who is dressed in denim jeans, an Osaka Swallows baseball cap, and a pair of Serengeti Vermilion sunglasses. He will get well within earshot of the characters, pause for a second to look them over, and finally, in a thin, lyrical voice, say, "Welcome to paradise."

The man will stand there for a second or two, then turn around and begin to walk off. If the PCs are not following him he will say, "Come on, you need to meet the others." This NPC (we will refer to him as Osaka) will not reveal his name or answer any questions in any but the most procrastinatory manner. "There'll be time enough for that later," he will say. "I want you

to meet the others. Besides, it will almost be time for dinner by the time we get to the camp." It is an Average: Observation task to notice that Osaka tends to speak as if he had just awakened, or was under the influence of some sort of drug. PCs who succeed at a Formidable: Observation test will, however, notice that he does not exhibit any of the secondary characteristics of a person who would fit in either category.

Osaka will lead the characters down a path through the jungle, which is comfortable and inviting, not swelteringly humid. At one point he will come to a fork in the trail and pause as if uncertain which branch of the trail he should take. To any character with Tracking skill, the left branch of the trail will seem much more travelled than the right one. If this is pointed out to Osaka, he will say, "Huh...oh yeah, that's right." If not, he will chose the left branch after about 10 seconds. Either way he will eventually lead the PCs down the left branch in the trail.

Eventually, a savory cooking smell and the vague odor of wood smoke will assault the characters' noses. Presently, the PCs will arrive in what must be Osaka's camp—a large clearing at the intersection of several trails, next to a stream. There are three other NPCs here—two other men, one who sports a long blond ponytail (Tail), another who wears a small, well trimmed beard (Beard), and a woman who is wearing a pair of surplus military trousers cut off into shorts and a black button-down shirt which she has modified into a makeshift crop top (Bikini). The campsite is littered with clothing and equipment, scattered haphazardly as if each item had been dropped wherever the owner got tired of it. From the nature of the equipment (including three MP-7 submachineguns, an M16, a Remington 870 pump shotgun, a well-used looking demolitions kit, a large first aid kit, and an ultraviolet spotlight) the profession of the group should be obvious to the adventurers—they are minion hunters, just like the PCs.



Name: Hades
Type: Halfland
Discontinuity: 1
Assimilation Effect Value: 0



When the characters first arrive in the encampment, Beard will be stirring a pot over the fire (the air will be rich with a mouth-watering smell of cooking seafood), Bikini will be sitting cross-legged, peering intently at the full moon, and Tail will be laying in a make-shift hammock, half singing, half humming a widely known childrens' song (referee's choice, something common like *Old MacDonald* or *Pop Goes the Weasel*) while he tries to weave something unrecognizable out of palm fronds. When Osaka arrives in the clearing he will ask "Where's...uh?" Bikini will respond, "I think she said she was going to take a swim and then get some mangos," but not look away from her moon-gazing. It will take a few minutes for any of the NPCs to notice the characters. When they do they will say hello and echo Osaka's "Welcome to paradise" sentiments.

There are several interesting things about the encampment that the PCs may notice in time. It is an Average: Observation task to notice that all of the other NPCs share Osaka's half-conscious state. It is a Difficult: Observation task to notice that the weapons and equipment are all covered with a very light coating of dust and sand, as if they have spent a few days in the weather without any maintenance. Finally, it is a Formidable: Observation task to deduce that the reason Tail is reduced to humming his song is because he has forgotten most of the lyrics.

After a while, the missing female NPC will arrive, still wet from her swim, bearing an armload of plump, delicious-looking bananas. She wears her hair cut very short and so will be referred to as Crew.

While the NPCs are eating, they will begin to share "war" stories with the PCs. The islanders' stories will be severely lacking on details. They will, however, cling to the details of any story the PCs choose to tell them. At one point Beard will say something to the PCs like, "This is great, not like that one place where Osaka got hurt, huh?" If one of the PCs point out that they have no idea of what he is talking about he will say, "Huh...oh, yeah...." and trail off.

The NPCs will reveal a couple of clues about the land they are in, including the fact that they only discovered it a little more than a week ago. Osaka will mention that he hasn't had to shave or take a shower all week and yet he still looks (and amazingly smells) freshly groomed. Crew may say something about



never really feeling hungry, but everything tasting so good that eating just seems like the thing to do. None of the NPCs will ever call another by their name or give their own name—they have essentially forgotten these trivial pieces of information.

If asked how they found out about this proto-dimension, the islanders will explain that they captured a folder pod in which the dimension was recorded. Beard opened a portal with his Dimension Walk skill for the others to come through, and Crew brought the gear in the folder pod. If asked about the pod's location the group will explain that they destroyed it to prevent the Darklings from learning the location of such an idyllic place.

If the PCs remain long enough, they may notice that the NPCs become increasingly scatterbrained, uninhibited, and carefree, willing to do nothing other than eat, sleep, and play in their tropical paradise.

The Truth About Hades

Every moment spent in Hades erodes memory and willpower. Referees should roll for assimilation normally. However, instead of informing characters of the effects of assimilation as they occur, they should note (in secret) what has happened to each character.

Once assimilation has reached completion, characters should lose a point of Willpower. After that, for every four hours spent in Hades, characters will lose 1 additional point of Willpower. If characters do not have any Willpower or it has been reduced to 0, then their empathic skills will begin to “vanish.” Every four hours, 1 point should be subtracted from a randomly chosen Empathy skill.

In addition to this, 1D6 of other skills will evaporate after one full day is spent in Hades. These, like the empathic skills, should be chosen in some random fashion by the referee. This effect is cumulative and occurs every day the characters spend in Hades. Characters also lose one solid contact or 1D6 points of networking every day they spend in Hades. At the end of a week, the characters will have certainly lost all of their Willpower and Empathy, up to 42 points of skills, and the names of virtually everyone they know. Attributes, fortunately, are not effected by Hades, and basic knowledge like how to walk, talk, eat, and so on will remain.

Normal equipment is not effected by Hades. A computer will still retain all data which has been stored

in it (although characters may not remember how to use it). Any DarkTek, especially Darkling bio-computers and other Darkling equipment which contains an organic brain of some sort, will suffer malfunctions and ultimately cease to function.

Characters must succeed at a Difficult: Willpower test any time they wish to leave Hades. If a character has suffered more than 10 points of skill reduction (including Empathy and Willpower) and their Willpower has been reduced to 0, the roll remains at Difficult despite the fact that this is, technically, an unskilled test. The reason for this is that characters will, somewhere in the back of their minds, realize that something is desperately wrong even if they can't quite figure out what it is. Darklings, while effected by the memory drain of Hades, are exempt from this Willpower check since the environment of Hades is not particularly appealing to them.

A character with no Dimension Walk skill may attempt to force another character to open a portal back to Earth. This is a Difficult task and may be accomplished with either the Bargain or Persuasion skill. Empaths who have been thus bribed or coerced need not make a Willpower roll to escape Hades.

The effects of Hades are recovered slowly over time. Every day the characters will gain back 1 point of Willpower or an Empathy skill. Also, every day characters should attempt an Average test of Intelligence. If they succeed, they may either regain 2 points of skill, 2 points of networking ability, or two contacts. If they have an Outstanding Success, they may do two of the above. Eventually, all memories and skills will be recovered.

Encounters in Hades

Darklings seldom come here (except for sport, as noted below). There are no dangerous animals in Hades, and no reason to have an encounter table. Characters in the jungle will constantly be flushing game birds (including incongruous, non-tropical ones like quail, pheasant, duck, and so on) as well as parrots, macaws, cockatoos, and other tropical birds. Also, from time to time, walkers will encounter small groups of chattering monkeys whose only purpose seems to be comic relief. None of the snakes or reptiles are poisonous, and the insects are uniformly decorative... not a stinging or biting or pesky variety can be found.



The Darklings in Hades

The Darklings are well aware of Hades' existence and its true nature. It is one of their favorite proto-dimensions. Not for actually travelling to themselves, but to get rid of particularly tiresome minion hunters.

The Darkling technique for this is very simple and efficient. They arrange for the minion hunters to learn of the proto-dimension's existence in one way or another, usually from a "captured" folder pod, a dimension walk device, or a Darkling prisoner. The minion hunters travel to the place, and decide to stay for a short time. Sometimes the victims die by accident (they forget that they can't swim, or that jumping off the top of a palm tree is dangerous). Sometimes the Darklings send hunting expeditions to Hades, but this is for the sport of it...there is enough room in Hades to accommodate a legion of trapped minion hunters.

The memory drain of Hades is a natural phenomenon, like any other physics shift. The tropical paradise

environment is, however, mostly the work of the ETs who genetically engineered plants and animals which would be easy to collect and would taste good. The numerous tropical islands and the temperate climate are natural features of the proto-dimension as well.

The Willpower check which is required to leave Hades is the result of technology similar to the empathic viruses. It is a special virus which has been loosed in Hades which produces neurochemicals that cause a euphoric effect. Human immune systems make quick work of the virus, but the PCs are constantly reinfected by remaining in Hades.

Instead of the scenario described above, referees may want to put the PCs in the islanders' shoes and send them to Hades without an advanced group to serve as a demonstration of what is to come. It should be noted, however, that without such an example the only way characters will notice what is going on is that they will begin to fail more and more task rolls.



MECHANIACA: THE MACHINE WORLD

Mechaniaca is a splinterland with a discontinuity of 1. As the Dark Ones secure their control of this proto-dimension (see below), it will shift upward to 2. Mechaniaca has no major physics shift, so its assimilation damage is 0, but its environment is extremely hostile to unprotected humans. In campaigns where the referee is using the limited access method to run the proto-dimensions, Mechaniaca should correspond to industrial regions such as the American upper midwest, or industrial cities such as Gary, Indiana; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; or Birmingham, England.

History

Prior to the 10 event where the ETs accidentally released the Dark Ones into the universe, the proto-dimension now known as Mechaniaca was a desolate and lifeless rock nestled in a proto-dimension just big enough for itself and its atmosphere. When the tentacular ETs (who often visit the proto-dimensions via their dimension walk devices) first discovered it, they decided that it would be of little value toward their conquest of Earth. Later, however, they returned with a grim project in mind.

The tentacular ETs, at least the ones which have succumbed to the control of the Dark Ones, have a severe problem. They seek to dominate the Earth, but they are far too few in number to actually achieve world domination. Fortunately for them, their technicians developed a plan: They would find a proto-dimension and use it as a proving ground for a series of robots. These robots would build industries, power plants, equipment, and most importantly, additional robots for use in the conquest and domination of Earth.

This would be no small feat. The robots would have to be capable of functioning independently for extended missions. They also needed to be able to work with the materials available on Earth. The tentacular ET scientists came to Mechaniaca to invent and perfect their self-replicating machines.

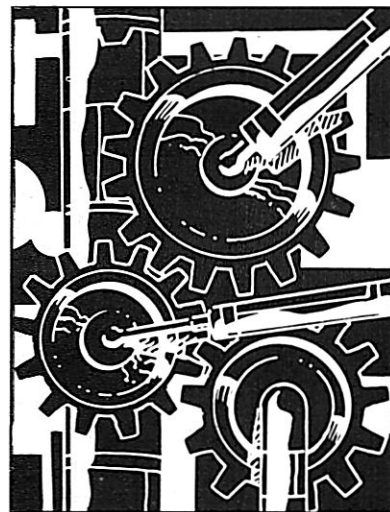
Their science proved equal to the task, and soon they had working prototypes of their new servants. These prototypes were set to constructing others of

their kind from available materials. One experiment gave a prototype unrefined metal, another prototype was given various organic chemicals, yet another was given the remains of various life forms, and so on. To the scientists' glee, all the prototypes succeeded in successfully utilizing their limited resources to augment themselves and to produce additional robots. To their amazement, they discovered that life form remains were utilized more swiftly and efficiently than any other material, a triumph of their bio-mechanical science.

The second phase of the experiment was to allow the new machines to replicate enough of themselves to begin their other tasks. The machines built mines and refineries to provide more raw material and more machines. Aside from the living quarters and laboratories of the tentacular people, these were the first buildings in Mechaniaca. Soon, assembly lines poured out machines by the thousands.

Phase Three was then put into motion. The legions of machines started building the equipment that would be required for the task of enslaving the Earth, and then modifying it to be more to the tentacular ETs' liking. More and more ores were extracted until massive mine shafts plunged deep into the bowels of the planetoid. The machines constructed industries which would be used to produce the vehicles and equipment that the tentacular ETs would need to rule the Earth, all according to their inventors' plans.

Then came the downfall. The machines, following their programming with a single-minded fervor, deduced that in order to supply enough metal for the industries, shortcuts would have to be taken in the production of new units. These shortcuts caused some of the new units to have incomplete instructions. In itself this was not a tremendous problem—the robots' instructions were highly redundant and they could usually cope with missing data, but there was another problem: Some of the machines had experienced



Name: Mechaniaca
Type: Splinterland
Discontinuity: 1
Assimilation Effect Value: 0



data-transfer failures during replication. These failures, too, were extremely minor by themselves. However, in the cases where no redundant instructions existed, these errors could not be corrected. What's more, unlike genetic defects in organic life, these programming failures did not usually kill the faulty machine. The failures grew worse with each succeeding generation and the faulty machines were producing a new generation every day.

One strain of the faulty robots, following some line of twisted machine logic, began to disassemble their cohorts for spare parts to make new machines. Still others began to take apart the equipment with which the tentacular ETs had planned to invade the Earth.

There were too many rogue robots to fight physically, so the ETs in Mechanica decided to instruct their creations to use their information exchange functions (that would have allowed robot soldiers to communicate with each other during the invasion of the Earth) to check their fellows' programming and, in cases where errors were found, repair those errors. The plan worked well enough at first, but errors still crept in. Instead of 10% of the robots being 50% unpredictable, 50% of the robots were 10% unpredictable.

Realizing that if their creations ever made it to the Earth in any numbers there would be little left to conquer, the tentacular ETs appealed to other ETs for help. The humanoid ETs assessed the situation, and created a plan for destroying the new mechanical menace. They cleverly inserted new instructions into the rogue machines' programming. Their core programming was too strong, too basic, to be modified into a suicidal directive, but their subroutines for industrial construction proved quite vulnerable to modification. The machines built new industries and soon new robo-form machines began to roll off the line, different from the robots the tentacular ETs created. When their numbers reached a predetermined quantity, these new machines began the wholesale destruction of the original type.

At first, the humanoid ETs' plan worked. The original machines (nicknamed *Symbiods*) fell prey to the new machines' (nicknamed *Steriloids*) attack. The Steriloids moved through the Symbiods like wolves through a herd of sheep, mowing them down and destroying them with impunity. Then the humanoid ETs discovered a problem with Symbiod programming that they hadn't counted on: The Symbiods responded to the slaughter by following their basic programming and assembling more Symbiods to replace their fallen comrades, often from the wreckage of those fallen comrades. The Steriloids could only destroy so many of the Symbiods before an equilibrium was established. In response, the humanoid ETs directed the Steriloid factory brains, the controllers of the Steriloid army, to produce deadlier Steriloids.

The equilibrium shifted even more into the Steriloids' favor. But then, with new generations available every day, the Symbiods evolved a new quirk: They ceased perceiving the Steriloids as finished products and began to consider them resources, materials from which to make more Symbiods. They began attacking en masse, overwhelming Steriloids and cannibalizing them. The Symbiods began to recover from their beatings. In response, the humanoid ETs gave the Steriloid master computers more analytical and decision-making capabilities, in order for them to cope with this and other new developments that might arise. The Steriloid response was to build machines that were better at defending themselves from close com-





bat attacks and that were more intelligent and innovative so they could formulate battlefield strategy without waiting for a solution from the master brains.

The Steriloids began to win again, as newer and even more powerful models rumbled from the Steriloid assembly lines. And they were needed, for the Symbiots had developed an evolutionary line toward sentience. Each day's generation displayed behavior that was more complex than the previous generation had. Ambushes, decoy ploys, and using the environment as a weapon all became standard strategies of the Symbioid horde.

The final, devastating development came when one Symbioid, observing the destruction of a Steriloid via the power lines which circled the world, built itself a spark-projector that could disrupt electrical pathways, confusing or destroying the brains of the Steriloids. This Symbioid survived to build more, incorporating this weapon into its "offspring." The weapon's effects ranged beyond the mere disabling of individual machines. In addition to erasing, the pulse sometimes only garbled Steriloid programming, mutating them in unknown ways. Ultimately, the master brains at several of the Steriloid factories were changed, and began to mutate randomly on their own.

The humanoid ETs lost contact with their creations as a result of these errors. Because of this, they did not know that one of the programs that had been changed was the Steriloids' main program. Its directive went from "Destroy the bio-mechanical units," specifically the Symbiots, to "Destroy the bio-units." The Steriloids took this to mean all life forms, and acted accordingly. It became virtually impossible for anything living to enter the proto-dimension without being attacked.

The tentacular and humanoid ETs pooled their resources in hopes of coming up with a plan of action. While they could be content to share the plundering of the Earth between themselves, they could not allow the hordes of robo-forms they had created to reach their prize—there would be nothing left of the Earth if they did.

They decided to install a device that would put the proto-dimension into a large version of the pocket-dimension. This would effectively remove it from the meta-verse, sealing it off forever (or so they hoped) from the Earth and the other proto-dimensions. Cut off in a tiny pocket of space-time, the machines would eventually destroy each other, and the original plan

could begin again. A colossal generator was constructed and moved into the proto-dimension. After it was activated, the ETs found their dimension walk devices unable to take them back to Mechaniaca and so they assumed that they had effectively sealed the proto-dimension. By the time they discovered that this was not the case, it would be too late.

The Machine Lords

Unknown to the ETs, another Dark Master other than their own was observing the project. In fact, this other Dark Master, weaker than most of its peers, was in some ways responsible for the situation on Mechaniaca. It ordered its slaves, weak humanoid creatures, to open a gateway to the dreadful place, so that it might inspect the prospects therein. The gate was soon discovered by the Symbiots, and a number of them attempted to pass through it, but the humanoid slaves were ordered to defend the gateway and, with their superior numbers, repulsed the attack.

Then the Steriloids discovered the gateway. Armored, heavily armed robot warriors assaulted the gate, bent on destruction of all life. They annihilated the slaves which had been ordered to hold the gateway. The Dark Master was pleased. Here were the tools to create misery on a vast, if brutal, scale. However, rather than spring them on humanity too swiftly (and risk losing its chance to dominate the Earth) it ordered its slaves to seal the gate and wall off the mechanicals once again.

The machines, soulless and utterly lacking in the empathy necessary for Dark control, would require guidance and development to make them into the instruments of terror the Dark Master desired. Because of this, the Dark Master commanded its humanoid slaves to build two robo-forms, extensions of its will with mechanical bodies and organic brains, brains which had already been given to the service of the Dark Master. These new servants were to be given great power by the Dark Master, and sent into Mechaniaca to do its bidding. Their mission is to direct and guide the evolution of the machines toward the Master's purposes.

The first of these Machine Lords, Edison (an evil joke...the Dark Master names its new Lords after Earthly inventors), has already been on Mechaniaca for a year (local time—see below). One of her



(Edison was once a powerful Indian mystic, a devotee of Kali, the Destroyer) first tasks was to open a gateway to Gehenna, the proto-dimension of fire, and to instruct the Symbiots to construct power exchangers around them. She is now shepherding the Symbiots' evolution toward the development of a sub-species of empathic Symbiots.

The second Machine Lord, Ford, will go among the Steriloids, to educate them on the conditions on Earth and to train them to channel their destructive natures down certain pathways.

These Machine Lords have been given the prowess and abilities to survive in the mechano-Darwinian hell of Mechaniaca. They are fearsome indeed, by human standards.

Description and Environment

The first thing that is noticed about Mechaniaca is its dimness. The sky overhead is a uniform dim gray, unmarked by any celestial phenomena. The ambient light is at about the level of late twilight, where things are hard to see and details fade into the gray. This is due to the fact that about 100 kilometers above the surface there is an opaque, unbreakable gray dome of time displacement that surrounds the planetoid. The sky would be totally black, but it refracts and reflects the light provided by the light sources on the planetoid's surface, and glows dimly. Occasional bright lights stab through the semi-darkness, projected from buildings or moving machines, probing through the haze that is Mechaniaca's atmosphere.

Humans will have a moment to contemplate the dimness, but as soon as they take their first breath they will find other concerns. If you need to breathe air, you will not be very happy in the toxic miasma that Mechaniaca calls an atmosphere. The stuff isn't just unbreathable, it's actively hostile to life. A mixture of carbon dioxide, ammonia, and methane with a healthy dose of sulfur and phosphorus compounds, and traces of freon, solvent vapors, and acid fumes, it will kill a human in short order. Smoky and smoggish, it also contributes to the difficulty of seeing anything at a distance, and attacks unguarded eyes. Unprotected eyes will water and burn rendering their owner blind until they are protected. For more on the effects of the environment on human beings, see "Adventuring In Mechaniaca," on page 105.



Aside from being unbreathable, Mechaniaca is hot. A great deal of heat gets trapped inside the time displacement bubble, and doesn't disperse too quickly. The world would have overheated some time ago, but great coolant systems were created, shunting the excess heat into other proto-dimensions (part of the Machine Lord's experiments). This takes energy, but Mechaniaca has lots (as you will read later). The temperature is usually about 38° Celsius (101° Fahrenheit), but it can fluctuate either way.

Characters might decide that they are thirsty, but they will have trouble finding any water on Mechaniaca. The only liquids available are the sludges heavy with industrial wastes and poisons, flowing through pipes and open aqueducts. Drinking this is almost instantly fatal, and applying it to exposed skin will burn like a mild acid.

The terrain is best typified as heavy industry gone mad. The ground is either bare rock, artificial fused rock resembling concrete, or metal plating. On every side, towering buildings loom overhead, connected by metal gantries and catwalks, sometimes divided by deep pits in the ground. The buildings usually have few windows or openings, and what openings there are stand unblocked by glass, plastic, or metal. Everywhere you look there are wide, arrow-straight boulevards lined with monolithic structures, some belching smoke from geometrically precise stacks, others apparently dormant. Lights shine into the gloom from odd angles, positioned on eaves, at windows and doors, on smokestacks, or suspended from catwalks. Cave-like tunnel mouths yawn, suggesting a way to get to the subsurface levels of this mechanical anthill of a world.

The sound of machinery is ubiquitous. The insides of the deserted buildings are filled with it. Some machines are still and quiet, others work away madly, automatically producing strange machinery or refined materials. Ambulatory forms do not seem to be present (a fact for which you should be thankful), the machinery is equipped with fixed grippers and waldos to allow manipulation. Finished products and materials are taken by suspended cranes and stacked for storage, but the stacks always seem to be recent, not the vast piles that you would expect from such manic manufacturing. Where do the finished products go?

Who takes them? Uneasy questions, with even less welcome answers.

Power is not a problem here. Power lines and conduits festoon the world. No matter where you look, there's an active power source. Sometimes too active—many of the lines and conduits haven't been constructed with safety in mind, and they spark and snap in the still, corrosive air. Anyone approaching within two meters of these lines runs a real hazard of closing the circuit for a 10D6 spark, against which conventional armor is no protection. Also, electrical devices close to these lines (within 10-50 meters) are affected—radios crackle with static, delicate equipment overloads, and high-energy devices malfunction. Other power lines run underground.

In one region of Mechaniaca, a reddish glow can be seen in the sky. If characters move toward it, they will eventually come upon a vast furnace, a seemingly endless pit filled with roaring fire. Green sulfurous clouds roll from the pit and flames leap into the sky. The sides of the pit are lined with some sort of black material, and huge power coils and transformers cluster around it, heedless of the heat. This pit is a direct gateway to one of Gehenna's lakes of lava. Its black lining is a bank of heat exchangers, converting the untamed energy into endless power for this hellhole of a world.

Uncomfortably, the environment of Mechaniaca is just slightly worse than what the Earth will likely become if the current pattern of ecological destruction and over-industrialization is continued. Characters who have spent a career term or more as factory workers will be somehow familiar with the horrid conditions and twisted industrial logic of Mechaniaca.

Adventuring in Mechaniaca

Before actually venturing into the machine world, a few elementary precautions need to be taken unless the characters intend on closing their eyes and holding their breath the entire time they are there.

The first priority is to sustain life in a hostile environment. The dangers and difficulties of Mechaniaca's environment are as follows:

Air: Mechaniaca's atmosphere is largely an accident. Most of it is the result of waste gasses from the various industrial operations on the planetoid. Although there is oxygen in the atmosphere, Mechaniacan



air is primarily a mixture of carbon dioxide, ammonia, and methane with a healthy dose of sulfur and phosphorus compounds, and traces of freon, solvent vapors and acid fumes. Any roughly terrestrial life form breathing in the stuff takes 3D6 points of damage to the chest every combat turn (30 seconds) until breathable air is provided and the poisonous murk native to the planetoid is screened out.

Exposed skin burns here. Every hit location will take 1 point of damage every four hours it is exposed to Mechaniaca's atmosphere. Eyes, which are more sensitive, suffer even more. Characters who have no eye protection will not be able to see at all. If they remain in this state for eight hours, they will suffer permanent damage to their eyes. This causes a loss of visual acuity, and blindness after 24 hours of exposure.

Because of the relative dimness of this proto-dimension and the atmosphere's murkiness, Observation rolls to see objects that are over 50 meters away are one level of difficulty higher. Firing at targets over 50 meters away is also one level of difficulty higher.

Water: Water is a misnomer. Although the free-flowing sludges on the planetoid's surface contain

some water, they also contain enough toxic liquids that they are invariably lethal. Drinking any of these liquids causes death within 1D6 combat turns. Applying them to exposed skin will burn for 1D6+2 points of damage per combat turn (30 seconds) until they are cleaned off. A single application will only burn for five turns (2 1/2 minutes), but a character who is unlucky enough to fall into such mixtures will continue to take damage until completely dissolved.

Heat: Characters who do not take precautions to protect themselves from the heat will, after 30 minutes in Mechaniaca, begin to suffer its effects. Every 30 minutes, characters must pass an Average: Constitution task. If they succeed, they take 1D6 points of damage to the chest and their Constitution is temporarily reduced by 1 point. If they fail, they will collapse and begin to take 1 point of damage per combat turn (30 seconds) until they die or something is done to remove them from the heat. Lost Constitution is recovered at a rate of 1 point per hour whenever the character is in a cool place.

Equipment: Minion hunters who plan to adventure in Mechaniaca need complete protection from the





atmosphere, as well as a supply of breathable air. Military chemical warfare gear (\$1000, —/C, 8 kg) with the addition of an aqualung or rebreather would suffice. So would a set of CES IIb or ExoSkel armor (DarkTek, pages 40 and 44, respectively), when fitted with an aqualung or rebreather. Spacesuits provide the longest duration of activity, but are extremely cumbersome, with double the listed effects (spacesuits are made for zero or low gravity, Mechaniaca's is about .82 Earth gravities). Since Mechaniaca is so hot, some sort of cooling system is necessary, or a human will soon die of heat prostration (sealed suits don't breathe at all). An Ice Box (DarkTek, page 45) would do fine, spacesuits have their own cooling systems built in. The best way to journey through Mechaniaca would be to take a sealed vehicle with its own life support systems, such as a Big Foot or a Travelmaster (DarkTek, pages 68 and 70, respectively). An NBC-rated military vehicle with life support systems added could be used, too. Any vehicle taken into Mechaniaca must have an oxygen supply for its engine if it is powered by internal combustion.

Supplies: Water and food are important if the minion hunters want to stay for an extended time. For more specific rules on water and food requirements, consult *Twilight: 2000*, pages 148 and 149.

An Unexpected Boon

There are "oases" of life-support on Mechaniaca. These are the abandoned but still-functional laboratories of the tentacular ET experimenters, scattered around the planetoid in small groups. The ETs built scores of these clusters, in order to allow them to travel from one to another and supervise or oversee operations everywhere on the planetoid. These building clusters are easily definable from the other structures: They're short (no more than three stories tall) and rounded, not brutally geometric like the mechanicals' buildings. Inside, the rooms are mostly stripped of their scientific gear (the scavenging Symbiods at work), but the life-support systems are usually still working. Apparently, the life support equipment registers as finished products to the Symbiods, probably because it is integral with the walls. The atmosphere produced is damp and humid, with an average temperature of 30° Celsius (86° Fahrenheit), but it is breathable (and a little

higher on the oxygen content—about 23%). The air smells like terminal mildew—apparently the ETs liked it that way. Of course, after recycled air and the pervasive stench of Mechaniaca's natural atmosphere, the smell of mildew should be almost pleasurable.

These oases of life also provide water, wrenched from the very rock of the planetoid by the ETs' sophisticated technology. It's smelly, just the way the tentacular ETs liked it, but it's naturally smelly, and perfectly safe to drink.

Each set of buildings has an air lock for an entry. This is because when they were built, Mechaniaca didn't have any atmosphere at all. They're a bit difficult to operate, primarily because their controls were built for tentacles, not hands. The first time a PC tries to open one of these air locks, it will be a Difficult: Agility task. After the first time, however, the task will be reduced to Average difficulty. Non-tentacular renegade ETs never have to make such a task roll since they are somewhat familiar with the technology involved. Renegade tentacular ETs can work these air locks as easily as a human could work a door knob.

Meeting the Inhabitants

Be warned—the inhabitants of Mechaniaca will virtually always be inimical. The Symbiods will interpret PCs as new raw materials, and the Steriloids will see them as life forms which must be destroyed, period. The only other mobile forms on Mechaniaca are the Machine Lords, and they probably will not react well to interlopers either.

The mechanicals move according to their own plans and programs. Symbiods either cruise like sharks, looking for something non-vital to convert into other Symbiods, or else they carry on their original mission of building and supplying manufacturing industries. Small Steriloids creep and spy, seeking Symbiod targets. Single Symbiods are attacked immediately, while large concentrations are observed until larger Steriloids can arrive for the slaughter. The big Steriloids occasionally cruise down the boulevards, wasting the odd Symbiod and looking for trouble. The Machine Lords are rarely, if ever, encountered, but they are off doing their own mischief among the mechanicals.



Encounters on Mechanica

There are three basic types of areas on Mechanica: the streets, the factories, and the underground. The tentacular ET labs are so rare that they do not rate an encounter chart of their own. Each type of area has an encounter chart below. It is up to the referee to mandate where and when encounters will occur. The referee may choose an encounter from the table below, or roll for it randomly. The Mark I, II, III, IV, and V Steriloids are found in **Dark Races**, pages 63-65.

Street Encounters

D6 Roll	Encounter
1	Symbiod: Single Symbiod without a body looking for spare parts. Adventurers would make dandy "spare parts."
2	Symbiods: Several (1D6+2) Symbiods with mechanical bodies carrying odd pieces of equipment (they are doing the construction work for which they were designed). They will drop their burdens to attack adventurers.
3	Trap: Symbiod trap for big Steriloids. It could be an ambush, a covered pit in the street, a catwalk rigged to fall on the Steriloid, etc. The Symbiods will only spring it on a big item, like a vehicle or a Mark III or larger Steriloid. If adventurers are on foot, 1D6+2 bodiless Symbiods will break off to follow them. The Symbiods are well hidden, and spotting them in time to avoid the trap is a Difficult: Observation task.
4	Tail: A Mark I Steriloid begins trailing the adventurers, waiting for a chance to easily kill them. It will also alert other Steriloids to the adventurers' location. In 2D10 minutes, 1D6 more Mark I Steriloids led by one Mark II Steriloid will show up.
5	Street Gang: A number of Symbiods (2D6) with mechanical bodies walking in the street. They are in formation to attract Steriloids. If they meet up with a Mark I, II, or III, they will attack it en masse. If they meet a Mark IV or V, they scatter into the buildings. The assemblage is usually tracked by a Mark I Steriloid, which vectors more Steriloids in for the kill. This gang will attack PCs and their vehicles if there are no Steriloids about.

6

Street Fight: As above, but the Steriloids have arrived and the battle has begun. The Steriloid forces include 1D6 Mark I Steriloids and 1D6+2 Mark II Steriloids. There is a 50% chance of the group being led by a Mark III Steriloid. These forces will always attack one another before attacking the PCs, unless the PCs become involved in the battle. At that point, the mechanicals assign them a target priority number based upon the danger they represent and will attack them the moment their number comes up.

Factory Encounters

D6 Roll	Encounter
1-3	Symbiods: A group of 2D6 Symbiods with metallic bodies going about their preprogrammed duties in the factory. They are building, repairing, or modifying the machinery, or carrying in raw materials/carrying out manufactured materials. They will break off from work if the PCs are encountered.
4	Calm Before the Storm: As 1-3, but there is a Mark I Steriloid watching. In 1D10 minutes, 1D6 Mark I Steriloids and 1D6+2 Mark II Steriloids will show up to destroy the Symbiods.
5	Birthplace: A innocent looking assembly line is actually producing Steriloids. In 1D10 minutes a fully functional Mark III Steriloid will roll off the line, lock onto and attack the party. Destroying the assembly line will not be very difficult, but it will not greatly reduce the reserve of Steriloids on Mechanica. The line will be repaired in a few days.
6	R&R: A row of oblong tanks are actually maintenance booths for Steriloids. In 1D10 minutes, 1D6 of them will open, releasing an assortment of Mark I and Mark II Steriloids.

Underground Encounters

D6 Roll	Encounter
1-2	Miners: A group of 1D6 Symbiods with metallic bodies going about their preprogrammed duties. They are mining ores



from the cavern walls. They will break off from work if the PCs are encountered.

- 3 **Spare Parts:** 1D6+2 Symbiots engaged in making more Symbiots. They will immediately attack adventurers—they need the parts.
- 4 **Trap:** Symbioid trap for a Mark I or II Steriloid (Mark III, IV, and V Steriloids won't fit into the tunnel). The Symbiots will collapse a section of the tunnel roof onto their target. This will result in the target being hit by 1D6 rocks, each doing 1D10 points of damage. The Symbiots will also spring this trap on human adventurers (parts is parts).
- 5 **Scout:** A Mark I Steriloid begins trailing the adventurers, waiting for a chance to easily kill them. It will also alert other Steriloids to the adventurers' location. In 2D10 minutes, 1D6+2 more Mark I Steriloids with two Mark II Steriloids will show up.
- 6 **Hunters:** A Steriloid hunting party (1D6 Mark II Steriloids) spots the adventurers and immediately attacks.

Using Mechanica

Mechanica is a proto-dimension which lends itself well to multiple visits in an ongoing campaign.

Why would anyone voluntarily go to Mechanica? Well, perhaps while there on one misguided trip, a character stumbles onto a strange artifact lying on the ground. It resembles a power tool of some sort, and in fact, it turns out to be one: a drill that uses disintegrator technology. It will punch a 25-centimeter-deep, five-millimeter-wide hole in any material. After a few seconds it will be recharged and ready to "fire" again.

A very short trip through some of Mechanica's factories would show that this is but one example of the advanced technology present, just waiting to be discovered, explored, analyzed, and exploited. Ever want to be rich? It's not as if the mechanicals are going to sue for patent infringement, so it is quite possible that the lure of money and/or high-tech goodies could motivate someone to spend some time in the land of homicidal machines.

Another scenario possibility involves the PCs losing a number of Mechanica's murderous machines into one of the proto-dimensions used by a group of Darklings as a base of operations.



Scenario Idea: A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste

Having provided the mechanicals with a permanent and limitless source of power, the Machine Lord Edison turns her fevered brain to the next task her Dark Master has assigned her. The mechanicals lack Empathy, and as a result, the Dark Ones cannot control them with their empathic powers. In order to move the Symbiots toward controllability, Edison seeks to have them construct new Symbiots using parts from empathic humans, retaining portions of the brain intact. The brains will add a sort of "Empathy circuit," vulnerable to Darkling Empathy.

In order to achieve this, Edison has been scouting through astral space, seeking the tell-tale silver trails of other empaths in the astral proto-dimension and tracking them back to their source. Once the empath is located, the Machine Lord opens a dimension walk portal for a Symbioid. The Symbioid will go through, kidnap the empath, and take him or her back to Mechanica.

The empath's friends will have to follow the Symbioid back to the horrible place and rescue the empath before he or she is carved up for Symbioid spare parts or wakes from his or her low-metabolism trance and succumbs to Mechanica's deadly environment.



PLAGUELANDS: THE PARASITIC REALMS



Name: Plaguelands
Type: Splinterland
Discontinuity: 2
Assimilation Effect Value: 0

The Plaguelands are a splinterland overrun by parasites and disease, a direct result of incursions by the Dark Ones. The parasites have run out of natural prey, and are now forced to seek out sustenance from other sources—like the human race.

The Plaguelands have a discontinuity of 2. The topography is strangely curved, as will be seen in "The History of the Plaguelands," below.

The Lay of the Land

The sky is gray, perpetually overcast with the threat of a storm. There is no noon or midnight, no sun, moon, or stars...only the constant gloom of perpetual twilight. The wind blows sporadically,

carrying dust and grit, and the humidity leaves you so sweaty that the grit clings to your skin.

Few leaves are left on the trees. Their emptiness reminds one of early winter, a direct contrast to the sultry heat. The barren branches are gnarled and foreboding. Malevolent vines twist through the undergrowth. Scrub-like bushes, brown and fragile, scratch at the legs of passersby. Fungus festoons the few green plants, their stems decayed by disease. Debris is constantly underfoot, like a forest floor of twigs and dead leaves. There are small creatures there too, misshapen insects, lizards, and small snakes. The ground moves and crackles with every step taken.

Characters arriving in the Plaguelands always end up in a region with the same type of terrain: flat. Vast expanses of scrub foliage and tumbleweeds fleck the treeless expanses. Gravel, dead grass, and blown leaves obscure the ground, hiding small parasites. Visibility here is as good as it gets in the shadows of the Plaguelands.

As the PCs progress "inward," the terrain becomes wooded. Heavy undergrowth surrounds large stands

of twisted, misshapen growths that were once trees. Their tangled branches have few leaves and are encrusted with creepers, moss, and fungi. The tree trunks break up the fields of view, and vines hang down to worsen the visibility. The debris that is constantly underfoot conceals many hazards.

Further inward, the terrain gives way to swamps or to jungle. In the case of swamp, the ground becomes increasingly wet and the debris increasingly rotten. Eventually all that is left are moors and bogs filled with filthy stagnant water. The vines in this swamp are much more verdant than those in the woodlands. Footing is treacherous, and everywhere there are pools of slime and decay camouflaged by fungi, algae, and rot—it seems that almost every step releases a cloud of marsh gas, reeking of decay. Dense fog banks seclude a few islands that are covered with riotous vegetation. The going gets worse the further one progresses into the swamp, so consequently, no one knows what lies on the far side of this quagmire.

The jungle is almost worse than the swamps. The impenetrable thicket is dark and threatening, and the tangled mass of brushwood teems with creatures of all descriptions. Animals have the edge here, and invading humans are taking their lives into their own hands. Trails twist through the jungle, but who, or what, made them is unknown. Following them for any distance is to invite an ambush or attack. Like the swamps, the going gets slower and more hazardous the further one progresses into the jungle.

The History of the Plaguelands

The Plaguelands are not just one proto-dimension, but are a triad of three interconnected proto-dimensions. The one which characters arrive in is the central proto-dimension (only after experiencing the other two can PCs dimension walk directly to them). If mapped on a two-dimensional surface, it would appear as a large circular plain surrounded by a ring of woodlands.

The other two are the swamp and the jungle. Each of these proto-dimensions borders the first with a vast, naturally occurring gateway, but neither touches on the other. The topology of the three dimensions is indescribably skewed so that unless one exactly follows a path that has already been explored (not an easy task, see below), it is impossible to know



whether a particular route will end in the swamp or in the jungle.

The first Dark Lord to come to the Plaguelands set itself up in the jungle proto-dimension and proceeded to modify and make thralls of a race of semi-sentient empathic creatures that lived there. Ultimately, these creatures became the race known as the skullworms. Next, the Dark Lord began to enslave a race of primitive, muscular humanoid which lived in the center proto-dimension of the triad to serve as cattle to be used by its skullworm servants.

At about this time, another Dark Lord began its own machinations in the proto-dimensional swamp on the other "side" of the Plaguelands. It too saw the humanoids as a useful resource, but not to feed its minions. Instead, it decided to make the humanoids into a servitor race of its own. What it created were the Incubi, a race of powerful empathic servants.

This Dark One also began to create an army of diseases. While it had taken steps to ensure absolute loyalty in its Incubi servants, it knew the troubles the somewhat rebellious skullworm army was causing its foe. Viruses and bacteria, it decided, could always be trusted. The bacterium called *Yersinia pestis* by Earth scholars was known as the Black Death in the 14th century and killed a quarter of the population of the world at that time. The Great Plague in London in 1664-65 killed over 70,000 out of a population of 460,000. A later outbreak in Canton and Hong Kong in 1894 killed 100,000 and ultimately resulted in over 10 million deaths. HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), the "Black Death" of the late 20th century, killed millions more, and was only a prelude to the dreaded retro-viruses of the early 21st century. Where did these catastrophic diseases originate? Why were they so deadly? The Dark Lord of the swamps and his Incubi know some of the answers.

Today, the two Dark Lords do battle (or rather send their servants to do battle) to decide who will ultimately control the Plaguelands. Their weapons are simple—the lord of the skullworms wielding an army of parasites and the lord of the Incubi spreading disease.

The war has spilled over into the Earth with ghastly results.

DARKLINGS AND BEASTIES

Among the life forms in the Plaguelands, the parasite is king, with disease a close second. A few sturdy, non-parasitic life forms serve as the basis of the food chain. Nearly everything else survives by preying parasitically on them, or upon another type of parasite (hyperparasitism).

The chief of the parasites are the skullworms: intelligent, empathic creatures that dwell within the brains of other life forms. However, as the strife between the two Dark Lords who vie for control of the Plaguelands has grown, other types of Dark Minions have appeared. Most notable among these are the Incubi, powerful empathic humanoids who are immune to the skullworm's attacks.

Skullworms

Skullworms go through three stages in their growth from larvae to adult. In the hatchling stage, the worm resembles a tiny leech, about one centimeter long, three millimeters thick, shiny and black. In this form, it burrows into the skull of its intended host and settles itself in the center of the creature's brain.





Plaguelands Beastie Encounter Tables

Encounters occur at referee's mandate. Referees may roll on the table below, or pick a beastie of their choice.

D6	Flat	Woodlands	Jungle	Swamp
1	Shamblers	Shamblers	Shamblers	Shamblers
2	Air Mites	Trapleeches	Gluerocks	Face Biters
3	Baby Stealers	Walkabouts	Face Biters	Gluerocks
4	Walkabouts	Face Biters	Creepers	Trapleeches
5	Giant Roaches*	Creepers	Walkabouts	Sharks*
6	Blood Vultures*	Army Ants*	Giant Slugs*	Bloats*

*Found in Dark Conspiracy.

After the skullworm implants itself in a host, there is a brief period of pain, but then the worm secretes a fluid into the host's bloodstream, putting the victim into a euphoric state. The host no longer feels pain, and physical damage heals three times faster than the normal rate.

Once it has established itself in a host's brain, the worm begins its transformation to the sedentary cerebral form. It extrudes thousands of fine tendrils into the surrounding brain tissue, taking control of its host. The worm remains in this stage for five to seven years.

As it nears time for the worm to reproduce, the final stage begins. Some of the tendrils shorten and thicken to become legs, and the worm begins to develop an exoskeleton to protect itself once outside of the host. At this point, it begins to resemble an immense centipede, up to 30 centimeters long and five centimeters in diameter.

When it is time for the skullworm to breed, it will find another skullworm-infected creature and the two will burrow out of their hosts' brains, normally by eating their way out the *foramen magnum*, the great hole in the base of the skull through which the spinal cord enters the cranium (an act that is gruesomely fatal to the host). Then they proceed to mate (hermaphroditically) and lay a clutch of two or three eggs each. The adults place these eggs in a protected location near a source of new hosts. As each egg hatches, the newborn skullworm begins its quest for a host. If the parent chose a good location for the eggs, the larva may only have to wait for a host to come near. If the location was poor, the larva may have to undergo a laborious trek to find a host.

Since the larva are not very robust, such a trek often ends in their death.

During the sedentary second stage, the skullworms are intelligent and empathic beings. The hosts remain alive and conscious, but they have decreasing control over their bodies. While the hosts do not perceive the worm itself (they realize that something is taking control of their bodies), the skullworm perceives the mental activity of its host, including thoughts and memories. With this knowledge, skullworms mimic their hosts' normal behavior. However, the worms do not understand human emotions and are unable

to mimic them properly. What this usually means that the skullworms try to avoid any emotional responses. Their hosts may say normal and believable things, but they generally do so in a wooden, emotionless fashion. Questions are answered in a deadpan fashion lacking any enthusiasm.

If empathic characters try to read the thoughts of a skullworm host, they receive a clear impression of a split personality. One personality is that of the host and the other is the skullworm. The host seems normal, but frightened and off-balance. The skullworm strikes them as both malevolent and arrogant. Such a reading can determine that one personality is a parasite living within the other.

The only outward, physical evidence of skullworm infestation is a small, circular mass of scar tissue about the size of a nickel where the larvae entered the body. Exploratory surgery or examination by X-ray, CAT scan, or MRI will reveal the skullworm lodged between the hemispheres of the brain, its tendrils woven throughout surrounding tissue. Removing the skullworm without killing the host is almost impossible (a fully equipped operating room and an Impossible test of Medical skill is required). Once removed, the skullworm will quickly die in the open air and light.

Skullworm: Centipedal (Adult)

Strength: 1	Education: 0	Move: 3/6/12
Constitution: 2	Charisma: 0	Skill/Dam.: 4/1D6
Agility: 6	Empathy: 2	Hits: 5/8
Intelligence: 4	Initiative: 6	# Appear: 1

Special: Adult skullworms devote all their energies to breeding and finding a suitable location to lay their



eggs. The host is killed as the skullworm burrows out of its brain. Centipedal skullworms will not fight unless cornered.

Skullworm: Cerebral (Sedentary)

Strength: 0 Education: 1+* Move: None
 Constitution: 1 Charisma: 0 Skill/Dam.: None
 Agility: 0 Empathy: 4+* Hits: 1
 Intelligence: 8 Initiative: 1 # Appear: 1

* = Host's statistic

Skills: Empathic Stun, Human Empathy, Dimension Walk.

Special: Cerebral skullworms are only encountered if the host's skull is opened. For all other encounters, use the host's statistics for everything but Intelligence, Education, and Empathy (see above). Damage to the host is healed at three times the normal rate.

Empathic Stun: After establishing an empathic link with the target, a roll is made versus Empathic Stun skill. Use this power level as stun damage to incapacitate the target (see **Dark Conspiracy**, page 103). Empathic Stun damage does not do physical damage, and is only used to stun the victim into unconsciousness.

Skullworm: Hatchling (Larva)

Strength: 0 Education: 1 Move: 1
 Constitution: 0 Charisma: 0 Skill/Dam.: None
 Agility: 0 Empathy: 4 Hits: 1
 Intelligence: 8 Initiative: 1 # Appear: 1D6+2

Special: Hatchling skullworms are one level more difficult to hit in melee combat and two levels more difficult to hit in fire combat because of their small size. If a hatchling skullworm lands on exposed skin, an Average: Agility test must be made to brush it off before it attaches. A separate roll must be made for each worm (one attempt per phase).

Once a hatchling skullworm attaches, it begins to burrow into the target's flesh, doing 1 point of damage to the body location per combat phase. Pulling it off, requiring a Difficult: Agility check, does 1 point of damage as well. When a worm has done damage equal to one-half the target's Constitution, it has burrowed beneath the skin and can only be removed surgically.

The worm then begins tunneling toward the victim's brain. One minute per point of the victim's Constitution is required to move from its starting location to the



brain. No significant damage is done while burrowing, as the worm is working its way through connective tissue. Once the worm reaches the skull, it requires 12 hours to extrude filaments into the brain and take control of the host.

Strong-willed hosts can regain control for short periods. Referees should allow PCs to make a Formidable: Willpower test to regain control once per week. If successful, the character will have control of his or her body again for 1D6 hours. NPCs will often use the time gained to destroy themselves.

Incubi

Strength: 12 Education: 3 Move: 2/8/16/32
 Constitution: 10 Charisma: 10 Skill/Dam.: 8/2D6
 Agility: 8 Empathy: 12 Hits: 20/40
 Intelligence: 3 Initiative: 5 # Appear: 1

Special: Dimension Walk, Darkling Empathy, Human Empathy, Persuasion, Project Emotion, and Project Thought. Incubi transmit an empathic viral mutator as well as other diseases. They are completely immune to all disease except for an empathic viral assassin which they, themselves, carry.



skullworms held, the Dark One of the swamps decided to manufacture servants of its own. These minions would defend the Dark One against its foe and do battle with the skullworms to keep the parasites from overrunning the entire proto-dimension. Dabbling with the genetics of the humanoids that lived in the Plaguelands, the Dark Lord created the Incubi (Incubi is the generic plural; Incubus for male singular and Succubus for female).

With the aid of a viral mutator, the already powerful humanoids were endowed with increased strength and skills. As the humanoid population of the Plaguelands began to dwindle under the depredations of the skullworms, the Dark Lord gave them empathic abilities and access to the empathic mutator virus used in their creation in order to ensure their survival. In addition, to keep its new servants loyal, the Dark One included a second mode to the mutator so that it could also act as an empathic viral assassin. This assassin mode can be activated by the Dark One on a whim and will result in the instantaneous and extremely gruesome death of the Incubi.

The Incubi now spread the empathic virus among humanity, in order to propagate their species. In fact, there are very few Incubi of the original Plaguelands humanoid stock left. The infection time is one month, as the virus spreads throughout the victim's DNA. During this period, the infected victim gradually develops schizophrenic behavioral traits, including violent outbursts and uncontrollable rages. This caused observers in ancient times to believe that such victims had been visited by demons.

The activation time of the mutator mode is only one day, but it must be activated by the Incubi who caused the original infection. The Host Cost is *Detection*: 100. The weight of the dosage is 0.01 (10ccs). Once activated, the victim undergoes grotesque and painful physical changes, becoming either an Incubus or Succubus (according to their gender). Spreading this virus is the only way that the Incubi can propagate, as they do not produce any sort of normal genetic material (see *DarkTek*, pages 25-27 for a more complete discussion of the empathic virus).

The Incubi use their considerable Charisma and Empathic skills to appear as humans and charm their intended victims. These encounters usually take place during the evening hours, perhaps to help disguise the true nature of the Incubi, and sometimes when the victim is asleep, hence the reference to "nightmares." The actual transmission of the empathic viral mutator is accomplished during a period of intimacy.

In addition to the empathic virus mutator, the Incubi carry other diseases and spread them wherever their master wills. Invulnerable to disease and the effects of age, or the attacks of skullworm larva (the Incubi carry an antibody which is deadly to the skullworms) Incubi can (practically) live forever.

Trapleech

# Appear: 1D6	Initiative: 1	Agility: 1
Attack: Special	Strength: 6	Skill/Dam.: 7/1D6
Move: 1/2	Constitution: 3	Hits: 3/7

The trapleech is a flat, round creature about 30 centimeters in diameter. Around the circular edge of the bottom side of its body are dozens of small sucker mouths through which the leech draws blood. It moves about very slowly, contracting itself like an inchworm. Lying flat on the ground, brown or black in color, the trapleech is hard to detect (Formidable: Observation to avoid the encounter).



When stepped on, the creature snaps around the foot of its victim doing 1D6 damage to one of the target creature's legs. Breaking its tenacious grip requires a Formidable test of Strength. If not dislodged, the trapleech slithers up and down the body until its tiny mouths can pierce skin and drain blood. Roll a hit location randomly, ignoring armored or well protected areas. Once attached, it does 1D6 damage per turn in its Initiative phase. Damage is done by blood loss until that hit location reaches critical. Then, the bloated parasite drops off and digests its new meal.

Attacking a trapleech that is attached to an individual will almost always cause some damage to the individual as well as the leech. It is a Formidable test of whatever skill is being used to attack the leech to avoid injuring the character with the same amount of damage. A Catastrophic Failure indicates that the character was injured, but not the leech.

Gluerock

Appear: 1 Initiative: 1 Agility: 1
Attack: Special Strength: 1 Skill/Dam.: 8/2D6p1
Move: none Constitution: 2 Hits: 20/40

A complex form of fungus, the gluerock is up to one meter in diameter and about 20 centimeter tall. Irregularly shaped and colored like a rock formation, an adhesive secretion coats the top side of the fungus and traps its prey. Spotting a gluerock is Formidable: Observation because of its deceptive shape and coloration (this becomes Average: Observation after the first encounter). Generally, it is a struggling victim stuck on the gluerock that alerts passersby that something is unusual.

If the gluerock is not spotted, the character steps on it, rests a hand on it, or worse, sits on it and adheres to the fungus surface. An Average: Agility check is needed to avoid falling down and miring another extremity (another foot or hand) in the sticky adhesive. It is a Formidable test of Strength for the victim to free his or her own limbs, one attempt per mired body part. Anyone assisting pulls a single body part loose with a Difficult: Strength test. If an item of clothing (a boot, shirt, or glove, for example) or equipment is between the skin and the gluerock, the victim may make the escape attempt one level easier by discarding the item, leaving it attached to the gluerock.

The gluerock extends needlelike penetration tubes to pierce the victim's skin on its Initiative phase. These spines inject poison to kill the prey. When the victim has stopped struggling, the gluerock absorbs nutrients in the corpse by oozing digestive juices.

Creepers

Appear: 1 Initiative: 1 Agility: 5
Attack: 50% Strength: 10 Skill/Dam.: 8/2D6
Move: 4/8 Constitution: 8 Hits: 15/30

Looking much like an ordinary vine, creepers have a diameter of three centimeters and a length which varies from one to six meters. Along the length of the plant are small budding structures used for locomotion. They detect their prey via the vibrations caused by movement—even movements as slight as simple breathing can attract a creeper.

Creepers are plant parasites that have evolved to attack non-moving victims. When an animal organism is at rest, the creeper slowly twines around its victim. A sleeping human target is not awakened by the creeper's lethargic, deliberate entrapment. After 1D6 turns of snaking its way into position, the creeper makes a strangling attack. Unlike normal strangling attacks, armor has no effect (unless sealed, close assault armor is worn) because the creeper slithers through gaps to reach the throat. Human victims who are awake become aware of the creeper in 1D3 turns (1D6+2, round fractions up), and may fight back with grappling.

Once the creeper subdues its target into unconsciousness, the strangling attack stops, and the attacker snakes about the host's body to place itself in contact with skin. Then the parasite secretes a substance which bonds the host's skin to the creeper's outer surface by dissolving its bud-like crawling appendages. This bonding process takes 3D6 minutes. The layers of tissue on both parasite and host slowly dissolve and merge until, after 24 hours, circulatory and nervous systems become intertwined. If the creeper is allowed to remain in this symbiotic relationship, the host becomes withdrawn, uncommunicative, and degenerates into complete catalepsy after several months.

The creeper secretes drug-like chemicals into the host, inducing a feeling of euphoria. A Difficult: Willpower test is required for the host to go along with



plans to remove the parasite. If only the skin is bonded, a Difficult Medical test removes the creeper surgically, doing another 1D6 points of damage each to 1D6 random hit locations. If circulatory and nervous systems have become entwined, the process is like the separation of Siamese twins. This can only be attempted by a surgeon in a fully equipped operating theater, and requires several successive Formidable tests against Medical skill (the exact number is up to the referee).

Face Biter

Appear: 1D6 Initiative: 2 Agility: 1
Attack: 100% Strength: 5 Skill/Dam.: 10/1D6
Move: None Constitution: 12 Hits: 20/40

Special: 1 point of woody armor to vital areas (roll on "Quadruped" table; armor is on "Head" and "Chest" locations).

The face biters of the Plaguelands are large plant specimens, standing as tall as one meter. Similar in appearance to the terrestrial yucca plant, they have a stalk supported by a large strand of long, pointed leaves. Atop this woody stalk rests a flower that normally remains folded, slightly larger than a man's fist. When a possible victim comes within one meter of the plant, this flower dramatically opens wide, displaying a beautiful bloom large as a human head, like a lovely orchid, with colors tending toward blue and purple.

In addition to the attraction of this sudden beauty in the horror of the Plaguelands, an invisible cloud of microscopic spores is released. These spores carry a powerful nerve agent which can be inhaled or simply absorbed through the skin. The nerve agent produces a powerful euphoric state, and so the usual reaction is to move closer, where the cloud is denser and the pleasant feeling more pronounced.

As the victim comes closer, the stalk springs forth, striking powerfully at the head (treat as an aimed, unarmed melee attack) and razor-sharp spines cut deep into flesh, biting off a chunk of tissue. A lump can be seen moving down the stalk as the plant swallows its meal. Often, the plant gets only one bite as the victim usually runs away. However, the face biter is able to store its meal and use the nutrients over a long period.



Bomber Bugs

Appear: 1D6 Initiative: 5 Agility: 8
 Attack: 70% Strength: 2 Skill/Dam.: 3/3D6
 Move: 15/30/60 Constitution: 6 Hits: 5/10

Special: Bomber bugs produce knockout gas in a large chamber in their lower abdomen, which can be emitted once per day to render their victims helpless.

A flying creature of the Plaguelands, the bomber bug has a wingspan of almost one meter. It appears to be a cross between a beetle and a wasp, with a large, distended lower thorax. These insects have two means of attack. One is simply a swarm attack, and the other involves laying in wait in an ambush.

The swarm attack is conducted by several bomber bugs, flying rapidly toward the target. During their approach and attack, the insects are one level more difficult to hit in melee or fire combat due to their speed. They swarm in circles, discharging knockout gas explosively from their abdomens. The gas is white in color and obscures vision. A Difficult: Constitution roll is required to avoid being overcome by the knockout gas and falling unconscious for 1D10 turns. Characters who are wearing gas masks will be immune to the knockout effect.

The size of the cloud is six meters radius per bug attacking, and characters passing their Constitution roll may attempt to escape the cloud. If they try to trot or run, an Average: Agility roll is needed to avoid falling due to poor visibility. Characters with infrared or ultraviolet vision gear may trot or run without an Agility check.

Once incapacitated, the victims are attacked by the bomber bugs. The insects land on their prey and poke them with their beak-like mouth parts, tearing off bits of flesh. They will rip off bits of clothing or armor, even hats or helmets, to attack anywhere (roll hit location randomly for each attack).

The other form of attack is used when a swarm of bomber bugs are ready to lay eggs. The creatures are hermaphrodites, and all produce eggs at the same time. Using the natural camouflage provided by their coloration and hiding beneath their wings, the insects lay completely still, waiting for an oncoming victim. When the quarry gets within a few meters, the insects fire off their knockout gas. The

unconscious victim is pounced upon by the bomber bugs, each extending an ovipositor which implants a half-dozen eggs in the body. This requires a single attack roll and does the regular damage due to the ghastly puncture wound. After the implantation, the bugs leave.

In addition to the pain from the wound, the awakening character feels the presence of the hard, pea-sized eggs implanted beneath the skin. Removal of the eggs is a Difficult: Medical task, and cannot be attempted without at least a doctor's medical kit. If the eggs are not removed, they are nourished by the warmth and protection of the host until they burst forth as baby bomber bugs (about 10 days later), about two centimeters long. The newborn bugs eat their way out of the host, a painful, but not necessarily fatal process (each bug causes 2D6 damage).

Giant Ticks

Appear: 2D6 Initiative: 4 Agility: 7
 Attack: 40% Strength: 4 Skill/Dam.: 6/2D6
 Move: 12/24/48 Constitution: 4 Hits: 7/14

Special: The giant tick's chitinous exoskeleton has an armor value of 1.

The Dark One selectively bred and genetically engineered Terran arachnids to produce this deadly parasite. Huge, savage relatives of the common tick, the giant ticks of the Plaguelands are the size of large dogs. They are fast, tough, and vicious.

Wary of a fair fight, a horde of giant ticks flees if the attack roll is not made. Bright lights also frighten them away, but loud noises have no effect, as their hearing is virtually nonexistent.

A giant tick attack consists of a grapple attempt with its raspy claws, doing 2D6 controlling damage per phase. When the victim is overpowered, the giant tick begins sucking blood. Blood loss gives 2D6 points of damage to a hit location selected at random, with damage taken during the attacking insect's normal Initiative phase. All blood sucking is done to a single location, and when that location is completely emptied of hit points, the bloated giant tick drops off to scuttle away and digest its new meal. Giant ticks always carry some form of disease (referee's option).



Walkabouts

It sounded like banging, something metal being hit. We decided it must be an animal, because it was intermittent. As we approached the clearing, we saw a small figure sitting in the sparse grass. It looked like a girl, a human girl. Her long black hair was matted and filthy like a rat's nest. An oversized sweatshirt was her only clothing. Something she was holding in her lap had her full attention, and we could hear her mumbling.

Suddenly, she stood up; not completely upright, but crouched, like an animal. She backed away and

gathered up her prize: a chrome, RetroTek electric toaster. The banging noises were her attempts to get the appliance to work. An upraised left hand held us at bay. Several large bulges like tumors were on her face, and bloated growths were on her limbs.

She looked us over with a steadied, wary gaze. After a long pause, she said, "You can help with this." The voice rasped in her throat, and the words were expressionless. Something crawled out of her ear and fell on the ground. We knew this pitiful creature could communicate, so we decided to help her. We hadn't met anything intelligent in the Plaguelands, so we didn't expect a trap. When she led us out of the clearing into the woods, the larvae fell out of the trees on us like rain.

Walkabouts

Strength: 3 Education: 1 (2) Move: 1/4/8/16
 Constitution: 5 Charisma: 1 Skill/Dam.: 5/1D6
 Agility: 2 Empathy: 1 (5) Hits: 8/16
 Intelligence: 3 Initiative: 2 # Appear: 1D6

Special: Numbers in parentheses include skullworm parasite additions.

"Walkabout" is an Australian term describing a solitary sabbatical taken by an aborigine, and the primitive humanoids of the Plaguelands had a similar practice. Wandering alone, these travellers were easy prey for the skullworms many centuries ago. Some returned to their tribe to spread the worm infestation, and others came to the Plaguelands for breeding. Walkabouts are mobile transport for the worms and other kinds of parasites. A skullworm can use its Intelligence and Skills while controlling a walkabout host, but sensory abilities (like Observation, Tracking, and Willpower) are limited to the host's Intelligence.

Humanoid in form, walkabouts hunch in a primitive posture. Movement is slow and deliberate. These humanoids are infested with all kinds of parasites. Their hair is matted and filled with crawling creatures. Fungi growing in the lymph nodes produce distended tumors. Creepers twine up and down their limbs. Occasionally, minor body parts like fingers or ears are missing, eaten away by disease or predators.

Used as hosts for skullworms, the walkabouts travel to our dimension to observe human behavior. The skullworms train their hosts to function like humans to lure victims to the Plaguelands. Walkabouts wear





mismatched scraps of clothing and carry some kind of object. Often a weapon or tool, occasionally a misguided walkabout clutches feverishly to a radio or lamp. The prestige of a skullworm is determined by the apparel and equipment of its walkabout, and enhanced by human-like behavior and conversation.

Baby Stealers

Strength: 5 Education: 1 Move: 2/8/16
 Constitution: 8 Charisma: 3 Skill/Dam.: 4/2D6
 Agility: 6 Empathy: 6 Hits: 11/22
 Intelligence: 4 Initiative: 5 # Appear: 1

Special: Empathic Replication, Project Emotion, Human Empathy, Dimension Walk.

Generally human-like in form, baby stealers are lanky creatures, about two meters tall, with fleshy, baby-like skin and thick, stubby fingers and toes. Their faces are grotesque caricatures of human infant features, with large eyes, tiny noses, and puffy cheeks. They move with a speed unexpected with their gangly frame. Possessed of little intelligence, they communicate by whining and crying.

Baby stealers reproduce asexually once a year using a reproduction chamber similar to a human womb. An embryo grows there, looking outwardly much like a human baby. However, its development is arrested at an early age, and it remains in a state of limbo for months. The parent soon begins a search for a humanoid baby. This will be either the child of the native primates of the Plaguelands, the walkabouts, or a human baby that the stealer has found during a dimension walk.

The pregnant baby stealer then uses its unique Empathic Replication skill to observe the shape, size, and coloration of the child. The embryo of the baby stealer is empathically imprinted with the appearance of the intended victim. Some 10 to 15 hours later, the baby stealer will retire to seclusion to give "birth" to its own "child." The success of the Empathic Replication roll produces a difficulty level to detect the counterfeit child with Observation skill: Basic Success and Stage Two are Easy; Stage Three, Average; Stage Four, Difficult; Stage Five, Formidable; and Stage Six, Impossible.

Returning to the location of the victim infant, the baby stealer will exchange its own newborn with the other. Human Empathy and Project Emotion skills are

used to keep the quarry quiet, and to ensure that the real parents do not try to stop the kidnapping. Once the baby stealer retires to a place of safety, the victim is eaten.

The false infant moves and appears to be similar to the real baby it replaced, but something seems mysteriously different. The difficulty level for detection goes down one level each day, and the fake child lives for 1D6 days. If the parents have detected the switch before this time is up, a medical examination produces an unusual, rumbling sound on a stethoscope. X-rays reveal several hundred larvae squirming around inside the simulated baby carcass. If the parents do not detect the switch before the time is up, the "baby" bursts and the larva escape. Many of the larvae die in the struggle to bury themselves in warm ground, but usually several survive to begin the baby stealer life cycle all over again.

Shamblers

The Dark One opened several gateways between our dimensions and the Plaguelands. Some were open for years at a time. The surrounding Demonground in our dimension became a stalking ground for skullworms. The parasites transported their new hosts back to their proto-dimension. Although these doorways opened and closed irregularly throughout the centuries, many types of terrestrial creatures still exist in the Plaguelands. The larger species naturally survive longer, functioning as mobile hosts for dozens of parasites at once. The skullworms call them shamblers.

Like the walkabouts, these pathetic beasts are covered with creeping, bulging growths. Many are missing limbs and can barely move under their own power. Shamblers wander aimlessly throughout the Plaguelands, crashing through the undergrowth. The parasites, along for the ride, leave just enough nutrient behind to extend their host's nightmarish existence. The shamblers attack almost anything, enraged by the pain of their infestations.

The exact type of shamblers encountered can be determined by referee mandate, or by rolling according to the table on page 120. Use the statistics from **Dark Conspiracy** for these creatures, but add 30% to the chance of attack and delete any running speeds. Referees who own **Twilight: 2000** can add other types of animals to this table, if desired.



Shamblers Encounter Table

D10	Shambler
1	Bears, Common
2	Bears, Grizzly or Polar
3	Camels
4	Cats, Large
5	Cattle
6	Elephants
7	Horses
8	Rhinos
9	Tigers
10	Wolves

Air Mites

Appear: 2D6 Initiative: 6 Agility: 0
 Attack: 100% Strength: 0 Skill/Dam.: 6/Disease
 Move: 1 (crawl) Constitution: 0 Hits: 1

Air mites, tiny creatures the size of a small insect, are carriers of disease. They are carried by a gust of wind and can appear in any terrain, virtually out of nowhere. Each character will be hit by 2D6 air mites. Feeling at first like grit or dust, they will quickly begin crawling around (movement of 1). Attempts to brush them off are Average: Agility, and each successful attempt brushes off 1D6 mites. If the mites roll a successful attack, they have contacted the character's

skin, either by initial landing or by crawling into sleeves or collars. The character will then roll to avoid infection (see disease rules, below).

Disease

Contact with disease is a constant threat in the Plaguelands. All of the flora and fauna, from the tiniest to the largest carry some sort of disease, and the Incubi often spread them deliberately. Some diseases are transmitted just by being nearby, spread through the air. Others can be picked up through virtually any kind of physical contact, voluntary or otherwise. Injury by any denizen of this proto-dimension is sure to carry some nasty micro-organisms which were along for the ride.

Plaguelands diseases originate in a dimension different from terrestrial medicine. A few of them respond well to conventional medical treatment, but most do not. The Dark One has made sure that these diseases thrive on organisms from Earth, despite their alien origin. Once carried to our planet, they can swell to epidemic proportions overnight.

Noticing the presence of a disease is Difficult: Medical or Biology. This task is more difficult than usual because of the alien morphology of most creatures in the Plaguelands, and the constant presence of parasites which may appear to be diseases. Contact can be avoided or minimized once a disease is detected.

If the disease is not noticed and contact is made, a roll of Average: Constitution must be made to avoid infection. The infection number of the disease is subtracted from the character's Constitution before the roll.

After the incubation period has passed, the referee informs the character of the symptoms. Diagnosis of the disease may then be attempted, a task which is Difficult: Medical. Plaguelands diseases cannot actually be identified with a diagnosis, as they are all unknown to our medicine. However, a successful diagnosis roll will enable effective treatment. For the purposes of these rules, treatment requires someone with Medical skill using a doctor's medical kit and access to drugs (a neighborhood pharmacy will carry most of these, but as prescription medicines are controlled substances, an appropriate contact will be required unless one of the characters is a doctor). A personal medical kit is for first aid and will not help in treating disease.





To recover from a disease, a character must roll greater than the disease's base recovery number. This roll is increased by the Medical skill of the person administering treatment and the Constitution of the diseased character. If treatment is begun upon the onset of symptoms, roll for recovery after another number of days equal to the incubation period. If no treatment is administered, or if initial treatment has not resulted in recovery, roll for recovery again after another block of days equal to the incubation period.

If all of these attempts at recovery have failed, the character has a chance of dying equal to the death probability (a D10 roll for the indicated number or less). If the character does not die, he or she recovers, but the referee should reduce Constitution permanently by 1-3 points (1D6+2). Plaguelands diseases attempt to reduce the victim's disease-fighting mechanisms to enable further attacks.

There are thousands of diseases in the Plaguelands. The exact characteristics of a disease can be determined randomly with the following procedure. Some diseases should be specific to certain flora and fauna, and players should have it easier on a second encounter. Referees interested in more detail on this subject and comparable Earth diseases are directed to the (more involved) disease rules in *Twilight: 2000*.

Random Plaguelands Disease Generation

Roll the indicated dice to determine the characteristics of a disease at random.

Infection Number: 1D6

Incubation Period: 2D10 days

Base Recovery Number: 3D10

Death Probability: 1D10

Possible Symptoms (choose your favorites): Abdominal pain, chest pain, chills, cough, diarrhea, discoloration, fever, fluid-filled lungs, general body pain, headache, malaise, rash, and vomiting.

Plaguelands Disease Example

A swarm of air mites attacks Turlough (a gust of wind carried some tiny grit that crawled, and he tried to brush it away, but he didn't get it all), and one of the mites succeeds in its attack roll.

The referee has previously decided that this group of air mites carries a disease with an Infection Number of 2, an Incubation Period of six days, a Base Recovery Number of 13, and a Failed Recovery Death Probability of 3.

Turlough has Medical 4, but fails his attempt to notice the disease on the mites (made in secret by the referee). Turlough's Constitution is 7. Subtracting the Infection Number of 2 equals 5. A D10 roll of 6 by the referee means that Turlough is infected.

After the Incubation Period of six days (by which time the group is back on Earth), the referee informs Turlough's player that his character is suffering from diarrhea, fever, and a wet, hacking cough. He attempts to diagnose with his Medical 4 skill, and the referee rolls a 2 so he completes the Difficult task.

Treatment begins, and after six days, a recovery attempt is made. Looking for a roll of 13 or more, Turlough adds his Medical skill of 4, his Constitution of 7, and his (lousy) die roll of 1 to get a total of 12 (a failure).

He gets another chance after six more days and another 1 is rolled, which means Turlough has not recovered. The Failed Recovery Death Probability is 3, and he makes one last fateful die roll, scoring a 4. Turlough has avoided death and his system has finally beaten the disease, but he loses 1 point to his Constitution (a 1D6 roll of 2, divided by 2).

Getting Lost

Direction-finding in the Plaguelands is almost impossible. There is no sun, moon, or stars, no night or day, and there are no magnetic fields to operate a compass. All Navigation tasks become one level more difficult in the Plaguelands.

Tools of the Trade

The Plaguelands are a treacherous place, with danger coming from many unusual types of attacks. A flak vest and an automatic weapon are not much protection against creeping insects and disease-carrying micro-organisms. Flamethrowers are popular weapons, killing not only the target but also any incidental parasites and diseases.

Gas masks are helpful, and a well-supplied doctor is a must. Those who really dress for the Plaguelands wear the CES IIb Combat Environment Suit or ExoSkel



high-threat powered armor (see **DarkTek**, pages 40 and 44), if they can get them.

Enhanced vision devices help cut through the gloom, so infrared and ultraviolet gear is useful. Binoculars don't do much good due to the constant haze. Starlight scopes will have some utility as well, but there is little natural illumination to amplify. Illumination rounds give a brief impersonation of daylight, doubling visibility in flat terrain. As an added benefit, most unintelligent beasts are frightened away by such light. Solar-powered devices do not operate due to the lack of sufficient light to power them.

The importance of radios for communication and navigation has already been discussed. Vehicles are a great bonus to mobility, but they need a good off-road speed to be of much utility. There are few paths and no roads, so the going is always rough.

The environment is dirty and humid, with detrimental effects on all kinds of machinery. For any Catastrophic Failure using a firearm, consider this to be a jam, not just a misfire. The gun will be useless until it can be stripped and cleaned, a task requiring no die roll but one that must be performed in a non-combat situation. Other skills involving the operation of machinery, such as Vehicle or Vessel Use, Mechanic, Electronics, or Computer Operation, have similar difficulties.

If characters have had access to **DarkTek** equipment (always a "two-edged-sword"), then an Antidote, Rejuvenator, or Doc-in-the-Box will prove highly useful. These alien devices handle the Plaguelands diseases better than any terrestrial diagnosis. Still, give them a reduction of one level for Medical skill tests. Another handy **DarkTek** item for use in Incubi encounters is Virophage (**DarkTek**, page 24).

ADVENTURES WITH THE PLAGUELANDS

The Plaguelands are an environment with a great deal of adventure potential. Here are some suggestions and possible scenario-starters.

Will You Help Our Village?

Strange, unidentifiable deaths abound in a tiny, remote town. The local authorities are at a loss to explain. Victims are getting their faces chewed off (face biters) or even their heads blown up from the

inside (skullworms). Clearly, something has recently opened a connection to the Plaguelands, and immediate action needs to be taken to close it off before a major disaster happens.

Runaway Animal On The Loose.

For shoot-'em-up player groups, this may be the best introduction to the Plaguelands. A remote farming community is harassed by random attacks from a large, unusual animal, like an elephant, rhino, or tiger (a shambler, driven to attack by the constant pain of its parasites). No one knows why this animal keeps attacking humans. A nearby patch of Demonground (with all kinds of nasty encounters), or a dark elf playing a trick, explain how the animal got here. The PCs will probably arrive loaded for bear (literally), giving them an edge of some kind.

All I Need Is A Small Specimen...

A field botanist for a famous university has found a very unusual plant on the edge of the jungle, where the local guides won't go. He believes it holds a cure for some nasty disease, and with a little more research...

If the PCs will escort him into the interior, he will pick up some more botanical specimens, and they get paid very well. Also, perhaps they'll find more than just plant life leaking through from the Plaguelands.

Nirvana

A band of Cultists (see **Dark Conspiracy**, page 173) have found their ticket to paradise. Just travel to this one place in the woods, and spend the night—the next morning, all your troubles will be solved. They lure weak-willed searchers for Shangri-La to become fodder for skullworms. Perhaps local law enforcers contact the PCs, or even a Cultist who wants to recruit them.

None Of Those Foolish Humans Will Find Me Here

A good referee will have given the PCs a nemesis, a recurring type of Dark Minion, or perhaps a specific character, that is constantly menacing them. Give them a hot lead on this bad guy, and supply some rumors about the Plaguelands. Their enemy thinks this is a great place to hide, because it's so hostile to human life. Let the PCs prove him wrong...or maybe prove him right.



PYRE: THE EXOTHERMIC PROTO-DIMENSION

Pyre is a splinterland with a discontinuity of 2, and appears reasonably normal to humans who arrive there. The sky has a bit of an orange hue and the air has a peculiar bleach-like smell, but with the state of the environment back on Earth, these conditions will not seem too serious. The weather does not seem unnaturally violent or calm, and the sun appears at the same height in the sky that it was back on Earth. It was almost as if Pyre were nothing more than a parallel Earth where humans never evolved.

The fact is that there is a considerable difference between Pyre and Earth, but the PCs won't be able to tell what it is until they have spent some time there. Pyre has a very serious physics shift from Earth. In Pyre, every exothermic chemical reaction produces much more energy that it would on Earth, and reactions that are perfectly safe on Earth become fatal there.

Assimilation with Pyre

The assimilation damage caused by Pyre's high energy physics is 30. The damage is partially a result of temperature effects, heat exhaustion, and so on, but is more a result of the effects that high temperatures have on vital enzymes in the characters' bodies. A autopsy of someone who died from the effects of Pyre would indicate that the cause of death was hyperthermia (an extremely high fever), although no indication of infection would be found.

A lone character who did not know about Pyre's unusual physics and who was beginning to assimilate would notice that it was getting warmer but would probably disregard the temperature rise as a weather effect. As further assimilation occurred, the nature of the character's condition would become obvious. Things which do not produce heat on their own, the handle of a tool for example, would feel much cooler to an assimilating character.

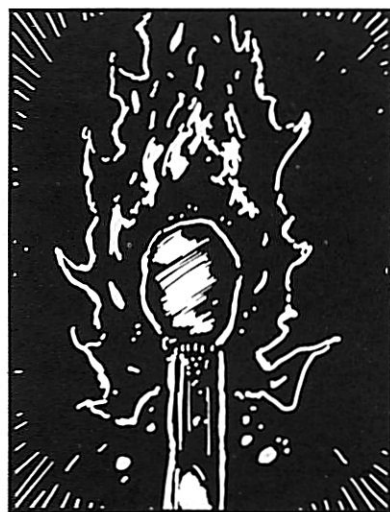
The nature of the effect would be much more obvious to two characters who were not assimilating at the same rate. To the character who had managed to resist assimilation, the assimilated character would feel very warm to the touch, while the assimilated character would find the non-assimilated character to feel unnaturally cool.

As characters assimilate, their bodies will reflexively do everything possible to reduce their body temperature—they will begin to perspire profusely and eventually pant in an effort to cool down. There are a few things which can be done to help this process along, but effectively reducing the body temperature of a character who has begun to assimilate is virtually impossible. Placing the character in cool water will reduce assimilation damage by 1D6 for half an hour or so. Adding a large amount of ice to the water will reduce the damage by 2D6 but will also do 1D6 damage divided up among the character's limbs by causing frostbite to the fingers and toes. Cryokinesis can be used to reduce damage as well. Each stage of success removes 1D6 points of assimilation damage. Characters in clothing that does not breathe, especially things like combat armor, receive 2D6 additional damage from assimilation with Pyre.

Other Effects of Pyre's Physics

Referees should keep in mind that not every heat source is of chemical origin. The heat of friction from rubbing ones hands together, even when fully assimilated, is not any greater in Pyre than it is on Earth (but reactions initiated by friction, such as striking a match, become easier to start). The sun in the sky (if it truly is a star and not some sort of extra-dimensional simulation) is powered by fusion and, as a result, does not burn any brighter or hotter than the sun in Earth's sky does.

Interestingly, while the energy liberated in chemical reactions comes from the interatomic bonds which hold the substances involved together, materials found in Pyre do not seem unusually hard or strong. It is much more difficult to freeze liquids in Pyre, though. Striking an assimilated match in pyre is like holding onto a weak firecracker as it explodes. An incendiary bomb would seem much more powerful in Pyre.



Name: Pyre
Type: Splinterland
Discontinuity: 2
Assimilation Effect Value: 30



Burning Damage: Damage that is done by burning substances that are assimilated with Pyre's physics is much higher. Thermite or white phosphorus does 8D6 points of damage per second when it is fully assimilated. Likewise, assimilated gasoline will do 4D6 damage per second per body part in contact with the flames. There are no structures to burn in Pyre, but grass fires there will do 2D6 damage per body part in proximity to the flames. Diesel fuel becomes as explosive as gasoline, gasoline becomes as explosive as C-4.

Explosives: Explosives which are allowed to assimilate with the physics of Pyre will be much more powerful (but also more unstable). Treat any explosive which is fully assimilated as if its number of damage points were quadrupled. Then determine the explosion's concussion from the equations on page 93 or the table on page 325 of *Dark Conspiracy*. This

technique would be very useful to characters who had a big demolitions job to do but only had access to a limited amount of explosives. The danger is that assimilated explosives will tend to be more sensitive, and the chance of a mishap would be greater. Demolitions detonated with a standard demolitions kit normally do not roll for mishaps, but with assimilated explosives, a mishap occurs on a 1D10 roll of 8+. With improvised detonation equipment, a mishap occurs on a 1D10 roll of 6+. Unlike conventional mishaps (see page 93 of *Dark Conspiracy*) mishaps with assimilated explosives are always a premature detonation (timing up to the referee).

Heavy Weapons: The same effects that increase the power of explosives also increase the damage done by antitank rockets, rifle grenades, or incendiary rounds. Unfortunately, the shell's propellant would also be increased in power and, as a result, the weapon would explode when it was fired. For most weapons that PCs will be carrying, this will

cause 1D6 damage to the arm with which the weapon was held and 2D6 damage to be applied to two randomly chosen locations. Firing an assimilated flamethrower, or a grenade or rocket launcher will be almost universally fatal. Loading an assimilated slug or warhead onto an unassimilated round is a possibility, but in most cases it would not be possible to assimilate the warhead, re-assemble it, and then get into position to use it before it had become re-assimilated with the Earth (inanimate objects assimilate within an hour).

Firearms: In the case of shotguns, battle rifles, automatic rifles, and machineguns, this damage is 1D6 each to the head, arm in which the weapon was carried and the chest, plus 3D6 damage to be applied to three randomly chosen locations.

Manufacturing specially loaded shells with less propellant is possible, but requires a Difficult: Engi-



neer task to determine how much propellant is needed.

Creating a gunpowder or smokeless powder that would function while assimilated with Pyre is an Impossible: Chemistry task. Failure either yields a powder which does not propel the slug at all or has the same explosive limitations as regular powder. A powder that would work equally well in both Pyre and Earth cannot be made.

Other Items: Assimilated matches and lighters are dangerous if treated improperly. Standard friction (a.k.a. strike-anywhere) matches can ignite in the box if shaken or roughly handled. Safety matches (book matches) are immune from this effect, but still explode when struck. Lighters turn into mini-flamethrowers, shooting a gout of flame almost a meter when ignited and sparking at the slightest touch. Flashbulbs will burst like small firecrackers. Dark elves are fond of using assimilated materials such as these for their fatal "jokes" on Earth.

Other equipment which depends on an exothermic chemical reaction will either overheat, burst into flame, or run some risk of explosion. Internal combustion engines, even diesels, are particularly vulnerable in this regard. Any internal combustion engine which is run with assimilated fuel will be destroyed after 1D6 turns of operation.

Batteries, which normally produce a small amount of heat, will get very hot after extended operation while assimilated with Pyre. For every 20 turns (10 minutes), a battery-powered device is operated, it must be switched off for 10 turns (five minutes) to cool down. If it isn't, there is a one in 10 chance per turn of the device breaking down. Devices which utilize very small batteries and only draw small amounts of power (watches and calculators) are exempt because they can radiate the increased heat as fast as they accumulate it. Likewise, devices which only occasionally draw from their batteries (automobiles for example) are not hindered by this limitation. Solar cells do not produce any chemical heat and, so, are unaffected by the physics of Pyre, but many devices which feature solar cells also contain storage batteries which are hardwired into the circuitry.

Designing a battery which would function in Pyre is a Difficult: Chemistry task. For every point rolled above the target number, these improved batteries will operate one additional turn before requiring a 10-turn

cooldown. If an Outstanding Success is rolled, batteries which never need to be cooled are created. If a Catastrophic Failure is rolled, the batteries ruin the device 1D20 turns after the device is switched on.

Life in Pyre

The plants and animals found in Pyre are completely alien to anything found on Earth (they have to be to deal with the proto-dimension's physics). Even the cold-blooded creatures of Earth would produce a lethal amount of heat just digesting a meal on Pyre. This alienness will protect a character from being attacked by most of the local life forms—nothing that is out looking for food will not want to be near anything that smells as alien as the characters, much less try a taste.

The reverse is also true. All native plants and animals have a very peculiar smell, and taste like economy-brand brass polish. If the taste doesn't convince a PC that the life in Pyre is not edible, the 2D6 points of damage to the chest that comes about five minutes after swallowing some piece of the local biota probably will.

Animals taken from Pyre to Earth die after assimilation (and vice versa). Likewise, the wood analog that plants in Pyre are made from will burn while assimilated with their home dimension, but if assimilated with the Earth, will not produce enough heat to sustain a flame.

Encounters in Pyre

The only Darkling race that seems to have any particular affinity for Pyre are the pale. While a pale is in Pyre, it is divorced from its need to feed on the body heat of warm-blooded creatures. This might imply that Pyre was the pale's home proto-dimension, but no indication of a pale civilization exists there, and the pale do not seem to take in any other sort of sustenance while there.

Some minion hunters theorize that perhaps the pale have an underground civilization based in Pyre, since the other classic limitation of the pale, their hatred of the daylight, remains in effect. Others believe that a pale who is in Pyre is, essentially, doing the same thing as a human who drinks a glass of water to alleviate hunger pangs—merely putting off the necessity of feeding for a short time.



SLIDE: THE SLIPPERY DOMAIN



Name: Slide
Type: Splinterland
Discontinuity: 2
Assimilation Effect Value: 20

Slide is a physics-shifted splinterland with a discontinuity of 2. In Slide, frictional coefficients are greatly reduced so that a rubber shoe sole on sand behaves more like greased Teflon on glare ice.

Coping with the Physics of Slide

When characters first arrive in Slide they will be amazed at how normal it appears. The sky is almost exactly like the sky on Earth. The sun shines. Healthy looking green trees grow here. Sure, they are taller and broader than the trees on Earth, but compared to the environment of many

of the proto-dimensions, Slide will seem more suitable for a picnic than an adventure. Then the PCs will take their first steps. After that, things will start to go downhill—literally.

Walking in Slide is not easy. Characters who are walking must make an Average: Agility roll once every 10 minutes to avoid taking a fall. If they are trotting or running, the task becomes, respectively, Difficult or Formidable and, likewise, becomes one level easier if they are only crawling. This assumes that characters are wearing sneakers, hiking boots, or other such footwear. If they are in some sort of slick shoes (leather-soled dress shoes for example), the task is one level more difficult, and it is one level easier if they are wearing some sort of spiked footwear like golf shoes, athletic cleats, or mountain climbers' crampons.

Navigating hills in Slide is an even greater challenge. What would be a gentle slope on Earth is one level more difficult to walk on in Slide. Steep slopes are even more difficult to climb, but it is only slightly easier to pile up dirt in Slide than it is to stack marbles on Earth and, consequently, steep slopes are very rare.

Characters who fall down will find themselves sliding along in whatever direction they were travelling for a considerable distance. In the phase after falling, their speed will be reduced by four meters per phase. This

will continue until their speed is reduced to one meter or less per phase, at which point they will be able to stop themselves. That is, unless they are travelling downhill. In the case of gentle slopes, the speed reduction is only two meters per phase, and on steep grades it is only one meter per phase. This means that a running character who falls on a steep slope will coast over 450 meters before finally coming to a stop. Of course, it is likely that the slope will level off before that distance is travelled.

As if things weren't already bad enough, simple travel becomes one level more difficult, and speed reductions are halved for characters who are partially assimilated. Characters who are fully assimilated must deal with walking at two levels of increased difficulty and quartered speed reduction.

For example, Turlough is trotting through Slide in a pair of baseball cleats. He needs to make an Average: Agility roll to avoid slipping (it would be Easy thanks to the cleats, but it is Average due to his speed). He rolls a 1D20 and gets a 14—since his Agility is 6, he finds himself flat on his back, sliding along the ground. He was moving 15 meters per phase and, as a result, will slow to 11 meters during the next phase, seven the phase after that, to three the phase after that, and will finally manage to stop himself four phases after he fell, having slid for a total of 21 meters.

Besides the difficulty involved in simple locomotion, any manual task that is performed in Slide is one level more difficult if the character and the items being worked with are not assimilated, two levels more difficult if one or the other is, and three levels if both are assimilated with the low friction physics of slide.

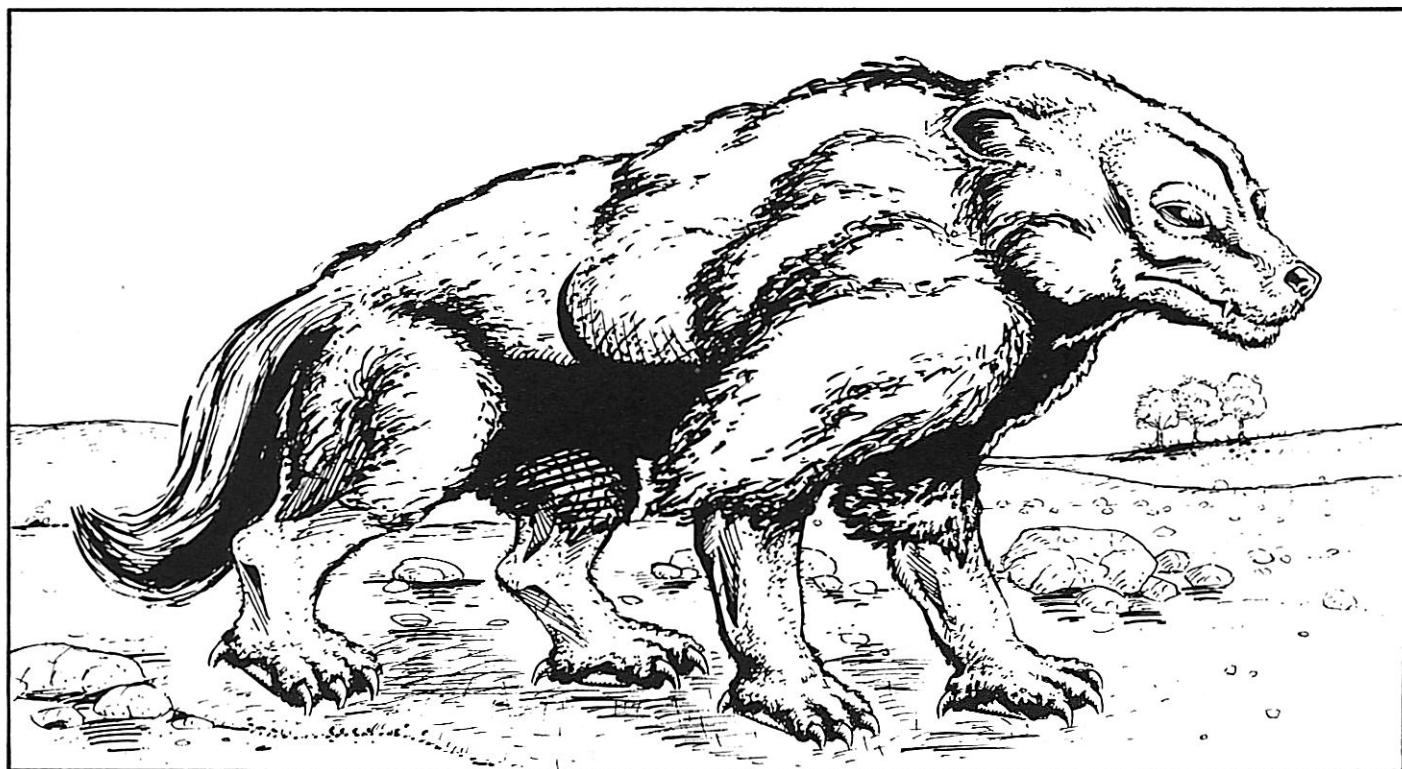
Life in Slide

There are many species found in Slide, but the characters need only concern themselves with one. These creatures are a small but lightning-quick species of predators called "skaters" by those who have seen their graceful means of locomotion.

Skaters

# Appear: 2D6	Initiative: 6	Agility: 9
Attack: 40%	Strength: 3	Skill/Dam.: 8/1D6
Move: 10/50/100	Constitution: 2	Hits: 4/8

Skaters are dog-like creatures which prey on the other animals found in Slide. They have two modes of



locomotion, which they use for travelling slowly for short distances which involves their sinking their wicked looking claws into the ground. The other mode utilizes long bony ridges on the animal's lower legs in much the same way ice skaters use the blades of their skates—hence their name.

In combat, a pack of skaters will move at their top speed and travel in a large circle (approximately 50 meters in radius) around their target. Then, the individuals will curve into the center of the circle to make attack passes, attempting to bite the target as they go by. If a skater connects, it will either drag its target along, in the case of small animals, or in the case of humans, it will have its movement reduced to 10. It will take two phases for a skater to get back up to its top speed after a successful attack, but during that time another skater will begin to spiral in for its attack, drawing attention away from its fellow.

When humans are struck by a skater, they must make a Difficult test of Agility to avoid being knocked down. Hit location should be determined as if they were prone, and being attacked from the rear. Once the target is prone, the location is determined normally.

The jaws and necks of skaters are incredibly stur-

dily constructed in order for them to deal with the tremendous stress of striking a target at high speed. Because of this, treat skaters as if they had an armor value of 1 on their head and forequarters.

Skaters will never attack if their numbers are three or less and will always break off attack if there are only three left.

Equipment and Equipment Failure

Many pieces of equipment will not function properly once they become attuned to the physics of Slide. This is particularly true of wheeled vehicles which use friction (between the wheel and the ground) to provide locomotion (and brakes, which use friction to stop locomotion). Keep in mind that adhesion and similar effects still work (albeit not as well as on Earth), and that no matter how slippery something is, it will not fit through a hole which is smaller than it is without something deforming.

For these reasons, high-adhesion duct tape and Superglue will work almost as well in Slide as they would on Earth, while nails, screws, bolts, and



knotted ropes (which rely on friction) are virtually useless. Bullets which have been assimilated will behave as if their penetration value has been decreased by 1, even if brought back to Earth (until Earth re-assimilates them). Nil penetration becomes 3 (weapons with only a Nil penetration value become 3-Nil), so a weapon with a penetration of 2-3-Nil would change to 1-2-3 until its ammunition reassimilated.

A note: Friction is the only thing that holds most bullets and primers in a cartridge case. Players who leave ammunition in Slide to assimilate the additional penetration will find that the bullets tend to slip out of the cartridge case at inopportune moments (such as when slammed into the chamber by a breechblock) causing a misfire or worse. Roll 1D10 per shot; a misfire will occur on a 1, jamming the weapon.

Some minion hunters use cross-country skis to travel in Slide. This is a very effective mode of travel.

Assimilation Damage

The assimilation damage caused by Slide's low friction physics is 20. As damage is taken, red blood cells begin to slip through pores in the blood vessels causing bruises, contusions, and tissue damage. Additionally, there is a chance (1 on 1D10) for a shoulder or hip (choose an applicable limb randomly) to slide out of joint whenever an assimilated character attempts a task requiring some physical strain (running, lifting a heavy object, and so forth). These injuries do 1D6 points of damage to the limb and render it useless until it is popped back into joint. This is an Average: Medical task. If unsuccessful, another 1D6 points of damage is done to that location. Even after being put back into socket, all tasks involving that limb are one level of difficulty higher for the next eight hours due to the extreme pain such jarring causes. This effect is above and beyond any modifiers due to the regular injury rules.

Characters should use their Acrobatics skill as their proficiency with skis. Travelling in relatively straight lines at speeds of 8 or less requires no task roll. Higher speeds and complicated maneuvers will require occasional rolls, however.

Matches and cigarette lighters don't work when assimilated, as these items rely upon friction for ignition.

The Darklings in Slide

Most of the Darklings avoid Slide as a useless (to them) proto-dimension. There are a few exceptions though:

The dark elves often use materials from Slide in their little games of murder and mayhem. Knives which have assimilated with Slide will easily penetrate many things that they normally would not. Likewise, the dark elves' brethren, the dwarf gremlins, often use Slide-assimilated materials to wreak havoc. If the crank case of an engine were filled with mud from Slide, it would continue to work—that is until the mud became assimilated with the Earth's physics, at which point violent failure would be imminent. The Dwarf Gremlins find this type of sabotage especially amusing when perpetrated on aircraft. Of course, the timing has to be just right so that the craft will go down minutes after takeoff and not simply stall out on the ground.





TARTARUS: THE REALM OF REVERSION

Tartarus is a halfland with a discontinuity of 3 and a very extreme and unusual physics shift.

A Land of Legend

There are two types of terrain in Tartarus. The highlands, which are made up of row after row of jagged, rocky hills filled with crevasses, small caves, and grottoes; and the lowlands, which are chiefly made up of a broad, almost completely treeless plain. Through the center of the lowlands runs a broad river of water which is heavily laden with clay, and in the center of that river is a small rocky island with a rather unusual feature.

In Greek and Roman mythology, Tartarus was the place of imprisonment for Tityus for his crime of insulting Latona, the mother of Apollo and Diana. The amount of truth in this story is uncertain, but there is at least a grain of truth to it. Tartarus is a proto-dimension in which a powerful creature (perhaps a Dark Lord who has fallen from the grace of his malevolent master, perhaps something else) is imprisoned.

As the legend states, this being (which we shall refer to as Tityus in deference to the Roman version of the tale) is chained to a high rock and is under constant siege by a vast force of bronze-colored automatons which resemble vultures. These machine-creatures spend their days tearing at the entrails of the unfortunate Tityus, and their nights perched in the trees that are sprinkled throughout the lowlands. During the day, Tartarus echoes with Tityus' screams of pain. At night, Tityus bellows what seems to be curses in a language unknown to the PCs.

Tartarus' boundaries are curved (characters may travel about 50 kilometers before coming back to their starting point), and the central river connects with itself.

Tartarus' Physics

There are three main features of Tartarus' physics shift.

"Healing": Tityus' torture would have certainly ended with his death long ago were it not for Tartarus' odd "cause-and-effect detachment" that erases (heals

would be a misnomer) Tityus' wounds each day.

This effect can be of great utility to PCs. Horrible wounds, even those that are automatically fatal, can be mended in Tartarus. At the same time, years of a character's life can be erased, and the ravages of age done away with.

Tartarus has disadvantages, however, the greatest being that practically every Dark Minion also knows of Tartarus' peculiar physical laws. Some come to Tartarus to recover. Others come to Tartarus in search of wounded foes to torment (to beings that feed on suffering, a place where the tortured feel all of the pain but cannot die is paradise).

Time: Time passes more swiftly in Tartarus than on Earth. The time ratio between Earth and Tartarus is about 24:1, which means that one day on Tartarus is equal to one hour on Earth.

Devices: Mechanical devices simply do not work once they have been assimilated. All electronic equipment (including radios, AutoNavs, dimension walk devices, and gateways), weapons more complex than clubs or bayonets, and any mechanical device more complicated than a belt buckle will not function. Explosives explode with full effect, but they cannot be detonated electrically; gasoline burns, but a flamethrower will not work at all. Matches work, but cigarette lighters do not. Organic DarkTek (such as folder pods) will work. Why the vultures work is a mystery...perhaps it is because they are native to Tartarus.

Assimilation

Assimilation is immediate for living beings. Inanimate objects follow the normal assimilation rules (see page 19). This means that mortally wounded characters need not wait an hour before the stabilizing physics shift takes hold on them. It also means that weapons and complex equipment will function for a short time.



Name: Tartarus
Type: Halfland
Discontinuity: 3
Assimilation Effect
Value: Special



Damage and Damage Erasure

While in Tartarus, no injury, no matter how severe, will push a character across the brink to death. Even characters who have suffered critical head wounds may live if brought to Tartarus within 60 minutes of their injury. Likewise, characters who have suffered other critical wounds will live if taken to Tartarus within the same time. Characters who are dead when brought to Tartarus may not be healed, however.

Tartarus can neutralize any damage that is caused by infection or disease, but it will not remove the infection itself (bacteria and viruses cannot die in Tartarus either). A character who was about to die of some disease from the Plaguelands could be kept alive indefinitely in Tartarus, and would recover from the physical damage after a long enough stay. Upon leaving, however, the disease will again begin to take its course.

Characters suffer all of the pain and crippling effects of their wounds, they just don't die from them. A character with a serious wound in the right arm cannot use that arm until it is healed; a character with a critical head wound cannot move or speak, etc.

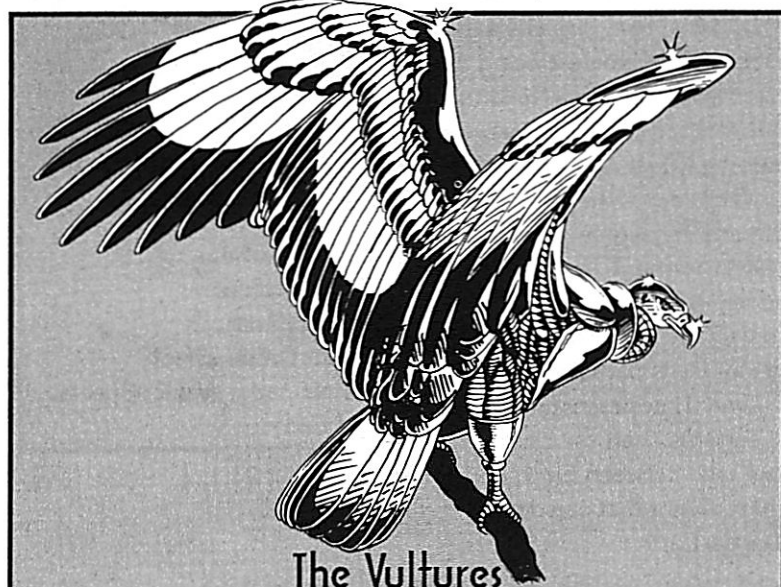
Dark Conspiracy characters have seven hit locations, each of which may be wounded. The number and seriousness of such wounds determines a character's chances of healing due to Tartarus' physics. Referees should consult the table below and total the recovery numbers for each injury:

Type and Degree of Injury	Recovery Number
Critical Head Wound	5
Other Critical Wounds	3
Serious Wounds	2
Slight Wounds	1/2

After determining the recovery number, the referee rolls 1D10. If the number rolled is less than the character's recovery total, then that character may reduce a number of wounds equal to the difference between the die roll and their recovery total.

Injuries must be healed in their order of seriousness. A critical head wound is reduced to serious before any other wound can be affected. All other critical wounds are then reduced before any serious wound can be affected, and so on. A wound may be reduced only one level per day (critical wounds may not be reduced to slight, etc). A character may always heal one slight wound per day, without making a die roll.

For example, Reynard got shot up pretty badly during a Darkling ambush. He suffers a critical wound to the abdomen, serious wounds to his head and right arm, and a slight wound in the chest. Although Reynard is unconscious, his companions take him to Tartarus, where they protect him from the vultures and other



The Vultures

Appear: 1D6 Initiative: 4 Agility: 6
 Attack: 100% Strength: 4 Skill/Dam.: 3/1D6
 Move: 10/20/80* Constitution: 4 Hits: 5/10

The vulture-things which torment Tityus are mechanical versions of predatory birds. If one is carefully examined after it is "killed," it will be found to contain a network of wires, pulleys, springs, and primitive clockwork gears. The vultures contain nothing organic, nothing electronic, and nothing that gives a hint how they actually work. There are enough of these creatures in Tartarus to provide an essentially endless supply.

The vultures will always attack any creature which dares to step onto the lowlands of Tartarus, but will generally leave those in the highlands alone. Characters in the highlands will encounter vultures only by referee mandate, and, if vultures are encountered in the highlands, their Attack possibility is reduced to 50%.

The movement for vultures represents Walk/Trot/Fly, not Walk/Trot/Run.



visitors. The referee determines his recovery number as follows: Since he is still suffering from one critical wound (3), two serious wounds (2 each for 4 total), and one slight wound ($1\frac{1}{2}$), his recovery total is $7\frac{1}{2}$ ($3+4+1\frac{1}{2}$) which rounds down to 7. Reynard's player rolls a 1D10 and gets a 4, which means Reynard gets to heal three injuries. Since the wound to his abdomen is the only critical wound Reynard has, that wound is reduced to serious first. Now Reynard may choose to either reduce two of the three serious wounds he has to slight wounds. His player decides to reduce the abdomen and head wounds.

If Reynard spent another day in Tartarus, he would have a wound recovery number of $3\frac{1}{2}$ (A serious wound to his right arm for 2 and slight wounds to his head, chest, and abdomen for $\frac{1}{2}$ each, $2 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} = 3\frac{1}{2}$), which would round down to 3. At best, Reynard could heal two wound levels, but it is more likely that there will be no effect. Reynard's player cannot choose to forego the die roll and automatically lose one of Reynard's slight wounds, as the serious wound must be dealt with first.

Age

For reasons not completely understood, Tartarus' anti-causality can also erase the effects of age. For each 24 hours spent in Tartarus (Tartarus time), each character should subtract 1D6+2 months from his or her current age. If a character's age is reduced below a point where aging effects were incurred, then those aging effects are also removed. A few months in Tartarus can make a character young again, but there is (as always) a catch: Characters risk losing their memories along with their debilities.

Any character who spends more than one day in Tartarus loses all unspent experience points. Further, characters risk losing a part of their memories. For each day a character spends in Tartarus, the character must make a Difficult: Empathy check to avoid losing a memory. Unconscious characters may not make this check, and automatically lose a memory.

The particular memory lost is determined by the referee, but it should be one of the following:

- the PC's most recent contact.
- the PC's most recent skill or Initiative advance due to experience points.

- an important fact recently learned, such as an empathic impression of a proto-dimension or an operating pattern for a dimension walk device.

Encounters

The referee may mandate encounters with any Darkling, or any creature of their choice. Dark elves and other Darklings who feed on pain and suffering are particularly fond of bringing victims to Tartarus for purposes of torture, since the victims cannot die no matter how horrible the treatment. The possibility of memory loss from remaining too long, however, keeps most Darklings from taking up permanent residence.

Organic life in Tartarus becomes younger and younger with each passing day, eventually ceasing to exist, which helps to keep the population down, but creatures of every type find themselves in Tartarus from time to time.

Freeing Tityus

Freeing Tityus from the stone to which he is chained is not possible. First, while the vulture-things which torment him will not attack PCs who are in the highlands, they have no such compunctions about those who venture into the lowlands. Any PCs who stray into the lowlands will be set upon by 1D6 of the mechanical birds. Whenever the characters manage to destroy one of them, another will arrive in 1D6 30-second combat turns later to take its place.

If the characters did manage to reach the bier, they would have additional problems. The chains which bind Tityus are not made of mere steel (Tityus' strength is to an ogre what an ogre's strength is to an average human; he could snap steel chains like bits of string). While he cannot break the chains that bind him, he has managed to rip one free of the rock to which it was fused. He uses this chain to kill the bird things that settle on his abdomen, but it is impossible to prevent them all from attacking and there are always more of the mechanical creatures.

Finally, Tityus' punishment has driven him quite mad. He will automatically lash out at anything which gets close to him, including potential rescuers. His unearthly chain, coupled with his tremendous strength, will automatically do critical damage to whatever they strike. Fortunately, in Tartarus, critical injuries are only crippling and excruciatingly painful.

If this is not enough to dissuade the PCs, the referee should come up with something else that will.



APPENDIX A: THE SCIENTISTS OF TRANS-DIMENSIONAL PHYSICS

A solid, scientific understanding of the proto-dimensions eludes the vast majority of the people in the empathic underground. Even sorcerers, with their specialization in Dimension Walk and its cascades, are mostly unaware of the fundamental underpinnings of the proto-dimensions. At present, there are only three people on Earth who can really be said to understand the proto-dimensions in a scientific manner. They are Dr. Andrew Tover of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dr. Yoshimari Sonada of the Nozomi Institute in Osaka, and Dr. Marilyn Donnov, formerly a research fellow at the National Superconducting Super Collider (current whereabouts unknown).



Dr. Andrew Tover

Of the three, it is Dr. Tover who has the greatest knowledge of what the proto-dimensions are like. Tover, son of a wealthy New England financier, was orphaned at an early age by an automobile accident that killed his parents and confined him to a wheelchair. Tover turned to intellectual pursuits, and ultimately received several doctorates, one of them in physics. Dr. Tover took a research chair at MIT and spent the next few years studying string theory and the shadow matter whose existence it implied. According to the theory, there could exist a type of matter which did not interact with our universe in any other way but gravitically—this intrigued Dr. Tover because it could explain where some of the universe's missing mass had gotten to.

Ultimately, Dr. Tover managed to disprove the shadow matter hypothesis, but not before generating dozens of new questions to which he turned his attentions. Dr. Tover's work did not appear in any of the scientific journals again for several years, but the eventual publication of his findings caused an incredible stir. While most of the people who read Tover's article could not begin to understand any of its implications, the final paragraph explained its shocking conclusion in terms which any layperson could comprehend:

It has not escaped my observation that these calculations indicate the existence of other universes which exist parallel to our own, but are displaced in space-time by means of some as-yet unknown mechanism. There is, in addition, the implication of another fundamental force or forces besides the four known to modern physics. There is, at present, no way to access or study these parallel universes, and their nature must remain a matter for speculation.

— *Annual of the International Institute for High-Energy Physics*,
Vol. XIV, July 2013

It was this article which put Dr. Tover in the scientific limelight. His period of fame was short-lived though, and he returned to his research work after a brief lecture tour and a couple of appearances on talk shows. It was not long after that that Dr. Tover had his first encounter with the Darklings.

Dr. Tover would have simply disappeared like so many others who knew too much and talked about it if it were not for Nightwatch, a large organization of minion hunters who operate on the east coast (see the folio adventure *Nightsider* for more information on Nightwatch). The leaders of Nightwatch were certain that Tover's openness would move the Darklings to eliminate him, and had assigned several of their cells to keep him under constant protective guard (without Dr. Tover's knowledge).

Nightwatch rescued Dr. Tover (the details remain sketchy, and neither he nor anyone else in Nightwatch will talk about it), revealing to him the extent of the Darkling menace to Earth. In gratitude, Tover decided to devote his genius and his family fortune to fighting the invaders, and joined Nightwatch.

While he cannot participate in the sort of fieldwork that Nightwatch usually engages in, his tremendous scientific skills and sizable fortune make him a primary source of high-tech equipment for Nightwatch operatives (it was he who developed the gateway detector mentioned on page 28 of *Nightsider*, for instance).



Tover's current research involves developing a device like the distorter (DarkTek, page 31) but which will be powerful enough to shield the entire Earth from extradimensional invasion. He is certain that such a device could be built, but he has made little progress on the project. This is partially because he is constantly distracted by more urgent duties (usually designing and building equipment for Nightwatch), but mostly due to the incredible leaps in technology which construction of the device will require.

When not lecturing at MIT (his position there does not require teaching, but Tover insists on giving a number of highly technical seminars each year), Tover can be found on the family estate in Massachusetts, where he has constructed a large private laboratory (he seldom uses the office provided him by MIT). This laboratory is currently under an around-the-clock guard by members of Nightwatch (primarily ex-military servicemen). In addition to this protection, Tover has a distorter operating around the clock in his home and in his lab. Tover dislikes firearms, but carries an S&W .38 special revolver with him at all times (for which he has all requisite permits and licenses as an honorary member of the Massachusetts Bureau of Investigation).

Dr. Yoshimari Sonada

Dr. Sonada's knowledge of the proto-dimensions stems from research into the world of sub-atomic particles. He hoped to describe the forces at work within the atomic nucleus with far more accuracy than any current model. If successful, his work would be a quantum leap in atomic physics and would put his name beside such notables as Bohr, Heisenberg, Pauli, and Millikan.

That was Dr. Sonada's hope, but the atoms were not cooperating. His results continually displayed large

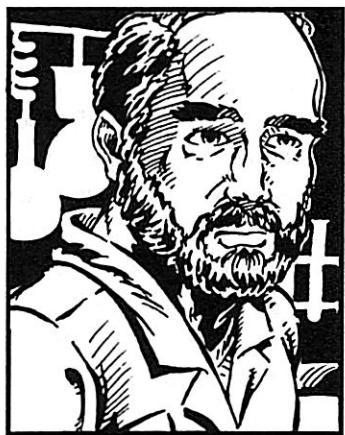
fluctuations for which he could not account. After painstakingly checking and re-checking each of his instruments, he began to wonder if, perhaps, his results were correct. Working under that assumption, he carefully analyzed his data and found that there was a definite pattern emerging.

Further assessment of his data sent Dr. Sonada back into the lab. The only way his data could be correct was if he was somehow removing matter and energy from the universe, an act which the laws of thermodynamics expressly forbade. Dr. Sonada's frustration grew as he continued to get the same impossible results.

Dr. Sonada shelved this research project and moved on to other experiments. Being unable to explain the errors frustrated him, but the Institute's facilities were needed by other scientists and he did not want to waste more time on a scientific dead end. Then one day, months later, Dr. Sonada came across the missing piece to his puzzle. A journal which he was reading just happened to contain an abstract of Dr. Tover's article, the one discussing the possibility of alternate dimensions. Sonada obtained a complete text of the article, and after reading it, a question occurred to him: What if the missing mass and energy was being moved into one of Dr. Tover's alternate dimensions?

Using the results from his former work, plus ideas he gleaned from communications with Dr. Tover, Dr. Sonada began work on a device that could move matter and energy into other dimensions. At present, he has managed to move small amounts of matter, no more than a few hundred atoms per trial, using his device. What he has in fact built is a dimension walk device, albeit one that is much less efficient than those used by the ETs. Dr. Sonada will be able to improve it in time—if he lives that long.

Dr. Sonada has not publicized his work, but its general direction is common knowledge in the international scientific community. Nightwatch (and Dr. Tover personally) have attempted to warn Dr. Sonada of the grave personal danger his experiments place him in, but he refuses to believe them. Tover and Nightwatch have contacted anti-Darkling groups in Japan, but it is not known whether any sort of protective force has assembled around Sonada.





Dr. Marilyn Donn timer

Dr. Marilyn Donn timer left her position with the SSC (Superconducting Super Collider) in Waxahachie, Texas after an accident which occurred during the testing of special magnetic field generators she had helped to develop. She and her co-workers at SSC hoped that this new technology would facilitate the vast improvement of existing particle accelerators.

The complete details of the accident were never made public. A spokesman for the Texas Department of Public Safety, shortly after the accident, said that preliminary police investigations concentrated on two possibilities: terrorist bombing or an explosion caused by a ruptured natural gas line underneath the building, and that all evidence pointed toward the latter explanation. The final report indicated that fire alarms in the building were tripped at 1:27 in the afternoon, and that the first unit to respond (a county sheriff's deputy) found the building engulfed in flames at 1:32. Additional police, fire, and ambulance units arrived over the next few minutes, but by that time the building was burning out of control. The report went on to say that all of the researchers in the building at the time of the accident were killed immediately, with the exception of Dr. Donn timer, whose survival is attributed to the fact that she was blown through a window by the force of the blast, and thus escaped the bulk of the fire that destroyed the building. The building and all equipment within it was completely destroyed.

There was, however, a report of a videotape of the building, taken by SSC security employees a few minutes after the alarm sounded, which showed a different picture. The *Dallas Pre-Dawn Leftist*, an underground hackers' newsletter devoted to Fortean research, distributed a digital copy of the the video several months after the accident. This shows two security guards approaching and entering the intact building (taped by the automatic video camera in their patrol car) at 1:32. The tape shows no motion for 30 seconds, and then the two bodies of, the

security guards are clearly seen to fly out of the buildings' windows, as if they were rag dolls hurled by a petulant child. The building then begins to glow with an actinic blue-white light, originating inside the lab, and then begins to burn. Dr. Donn timer is shown staggering through the door of the building just ahead of the flames, obviously injured. No one in a position of authority in the state of Texas will comment on this video, other than to declare it an obvious forgery.

Dr. Donn timer survived the catastrophe, but was hospitalized with severe burns, contusions, and a mild concussion. In an interview given shortly after she was admitted (before she was moved into intensive care and reporters denied all access), Dr. Donn timer stated the opinion that the fields which were created by the new generators weakened the fabric of the universe somehow, and tapped into an alternate reality. Something reached through she said, something big that destroyed all it touched. When it touched the generators, they exploded, and ejected the monstrosity back through the hole in reality.

Dr. Donn timer was eventually released from intensive care and transferred to a regular hospital room, where she gave an interview rescinding her earlier statement. "I was injured, and clearly delusional," she said, "and I have no clear memory of the accident. That is all I have to say on the subject, as I would prefer to put this horrible affair behind me and get on with my life."

The next day, Dr. Donn timer checked herself out of the hospital, resigned her position and vanished. The only forwarding address she left was a post office box in Dallas (which turned out to be a mail-drop). Nurses at the hospital, when questioned, told of how Dr. Donn timer received a visitor on her last day in the hospital, a distinguished-looking woman who met with her for almost three hours before leaving. Rumor among the empathic underground is that this woman was an empath, a recruiter for an anti-Darkling group in Arizona. Dr. Donn timer's present whereabouts are unknown, although it is rumored she is living somewhere in Arizona, researching the effects her generators had on the interdimensional fabric and training to develop her empathic potential.



APPENDIX B: DISCONTINUITY NUMBERS

The following table gives the discontinuity values for the home dimensions of selected Darklings taken from the pages of **Dark Conspiracy** and **Dark Races**.

<i>Darkling</i>	<i>Discontinuity</i>
Bhuta	2
Bloodkin	3
Boogey Man	1
Brain Eater	2
Charon	0
Charon's Servant	0
Child Monster	1
Cobra People	1
Daemon	3
Dark Elf	1
Dread Sidhe	1
Dream Master	1
Dreamweaver	2
ET	0
Gargoyle, Lesser	1
Gargoyle, Mediterranean	2
Gargoyle, Rock	2
Gargoyle, Subterranean	2
Glimmering	5
Gremlin, Dwarf	2
Gremlin, Torgol's	2
Harpy	1
Hellfire	2
Khar'lanki	1
Lesser Vampire	0
Lilutu	2
Marterkind	0
Medusa	2
Mesmer	0
Morlock	1
Nukid	0
Ogre	1
Pale	2
Penanngalan	3
Plagueling	1
Ptero-Raven	1
Ravager	2
Reaver	3
Stalker	1
Storm Wraith	3
Super Rat	0
Toxic Mother	0
Tulpa	0
Wailer	1
Wendigo	2

APPENDIX C: GLOSSARY

Anchor: A dimensional anchor (less commonly known as a physical portal) is a complicated device that acts as the entry point for an interdimensional gateway. One anchor is required at each end of the gateway, connected by the transdimensional portal. See page 48.

Assimilation: The process by which an object or being adapts to the physical laws of a different proto-dimension is called assimilation. In some cases, no harm is done; in some cases, the change is harmful. An alternate form of assimilation takes place at the referee's option, where an object or being changes into a corresponding object or being from the new proto-dimension.

Astral Proto-Dimension: The astral plane is functionally equivalent to the Interstices. See the Interstices chapter, beginning on page 23.

Correspondence: The principle of correspondence dictates that every point in a proto-dimension corresponds to a specific point in another proto-dimension, just as every location on the first floor of a building has a corresponding location on the other floors. See the more detailed explanation on page 18.

Curvature: The extent to which a given proto-dimension curves back upon itself is known as its curvature. This curvature is not part of the terrain, in the way that the Earth is curved, but is a part of the time/space fabric of the proto-dimension instead.

Dimension: The word "dimension" is not, technically, interchangeable with the word "proto-dimension," although it has been used this way in several **Dark Conspiracy** books and articles. There are significant differences between a true dimension and a proto-dimension. The only time the word dimension should be used is when both the **Dark Conspiracy** universe (a true dimension) and the proto-dimensions are being discussed together. For example, it might be said that the Dimension Walk skill allows its users to travel within the dimensions.

At this point, no interdimensional traveller, human or Darkling, has made its way into another true dimension (this includes astral travellers as well). The anti-dimension which is mentioned in **Dark Races** (Glimmering, pages 40-41) may, in fact, be a true dimension, but this is only a matter of speculation.

Discontinuity: Discontinuity is a relative rating of the "weirdness" of a given proto-dimension, compared to Earth. Simply because two creatures share the same discontinuity does not mean that they are alike, merely that they are more or less equally strange compared to an Earthly norm.

Fragmentary Proto-Dimension: The most surreal of proto-dimensions, usually very small, and dominated by one or two singular features.



Gate, Gateway: An interdimensional gateway (sometimes called gate for short) is a device which directly connects two proto-dimensions (or two spots in the same proto-dimension). Gates use a transdimensional tunnel identical to that created by empaths for interdimensional travel, but the tunnel created is more or less permanent as long as power is supplied to the dimensional anchors (q.v.) at both ends. Gateways do not require Empathy to use.

Halfland: Halflands are a better simulation of reality than fragmentary proto-dimensions, but will never be mistaken for a complete world.

Hardened Proto-Dimension: A proto-dimension that is more difficult to enter than its comparative discontinuities would otherwise indicate. See "The Dimension Walk Task," page 35.

Interstices: The *interstices* are that portion of the meta-verse which fills the spaces between the other parts. The interstices connect, permeate, and surround the universe of Earth, and the proto-dimensions. See the interstices chapter, beginning on page 23. The Interstices is functionally equivalent to the astral plane.

Magnetic Proto-Dimension: A proto-dimension that is easier to enter than its comparative discontinuities would otherwise indicate. See "The Dimension Walk Task," page 35.

Meta-Physics: The basic operating principles of the meta-verse, which remain constant in all proto-dimensions.

Meta-Universe, Meta-Verse: The meta-universe (meta-verse for short) is composed of three parts: the interstices, the universe (of Earth), and the proto-dimensions. Another name for meta-verse is true dimension or complete dimension, but meta-verse is used in *Dark Conspiracy* because it is less confusing.

Pocket Proto-Dimension: A pocket proto-dimension is a subset of the fragmentary proto-dimensions, usually no more than two or three cubic meters in size. These "bubbles" of proto-dimensional space can only be created by extremely potent empathic or technological powers, and can normally be entered only from a single location. For a more complete discussion of these proto-dimensions, see page 9.

Portal: A transdimensional tunnel, either opened by an empath using Dimension Walk or connecting two anchors as part of an interdimensional gateway.

Proto-Dimension: A proto-dimension is a quasi-reality, a parallel world or (more often) worldlet existing as a part of the overall meta-verse.

Quantum Proto-Dimension: A special variety of proto-dimension, a subclass where time or distance may be stretched or compressed. The quantum proto-dimensions are the proto-dimensions which are described on

page 235 of *Dark Conspiracy* and are the undeveloped proto-dimensions discussed on page 77 of the *Empathic Sourcebook*. For a complete discussion, see pages 10-14.

Right-Angle Travel: In right-angle travel, a dimension walker moves from a given point in one proto-dimension to a point in another proto-dimension corresponding to that point (within the limits of accuracy, see page 42).

Shadow Proto-Dimension, Shadow Dimension: A less common term used by some authorities to refer to halflands.

Skew: In skewed travel, a dimension walker intentionally deviates from strict right angle travel to arrive at non-corresponding point in another proto-dimension.

Softened Proto-Dimension: A proto-dimension that is easier to leave than its comparative discontinuities would otherwise indicate. See "The Dimension Walk Task," page 35. Softened proto-dimensions are rare.

Splinterland: Splinterlands are proto-dimensions which most closely resemble the universe of Earth. Instead of being defined by their environment only, as the other types of proto-dimensions tend to be, the splinterlands are primarily defined by the events that have occurred there.

Sticky Proto-Dimension: A proto-dimension that is more difficult to leave than its comparative discontinuities would otherwise indicate. See "The Dimension Walk Task," page 35.

Universe: The English language is sorely lacking in terms for discussing other universes or differentiating one from another. The only name we have for our universe is "the universe." There is no clear precedent for the naming of parallel universes at all, apart from science fiction and comic books where they usually receive a terse nickname or perhaps just a number. Nazi World, Confederate World, Counter-Earth, and Earth-II are a handful of examples.

In this sourcebook, the terms "the universe," "reality," and "Earth" will all apply to the universe of *Dark Conspiracy*. This means that "Earth" will not always be used as an exclusive term referring to the third planet out from Sol. Statements like "...although it contradicts the physics of Earth" include not only the Earth, but the rest of the universe in which our Earth is found.

Vertical Offset: Vertical offset is where a dimension walker intentionally attempts to arrive in a proto-dimension at a point at a different altitude than the corresponding point in the source proto-dimension. This is used to travel to the upper floors of a tall building, for example.

X-Y-Z-Γ Axis: A coordinate system incorporating the three conventional axes (X-Y-Z) and a fourth called Γ (gamma). Just as the three X-Y-Z axes are at right angles to each other, the Γ (gamma) axis is at right angles to the X-Y-Z axes.



APPENDIX D: D20 SYSTEM

After extended playtesting, the official system of *Dark Conspiracy* and other games using the *Twilight: 2000* rules system has been changed from a D10-based to a D20-based system. This system, while similar in many ways to the system published in the *PC Booster Kit*, is actually quite different. This new system does not require modification to attribute stats or skill levels in the character generation process, and is fully compatible with all weapons in the *Twilight* system, including recoil stats, which the system in the *PC Booster Kit* was not. This D20 system allows for the same five distinctive task difficulty levels of the other system, but defaulting to controlling attributes is easier and has a higher rate of success than the old system, something that can be very, very important in the dark and deadly world of *Dark Conspiracy*.

D20 Character Generation Changes

The rules that follow explain how to create the range of skill levels necessary for the D20 system.

Basic Attributes: Generate these normally, as per the basic game rules.

Skill Levels: Generate all skill levels normally, but in addition record the total of the skill level and its controlling attribute. For example, a character with a STR of 9 and a Melee Combat (Unarmed) skill of 7 would record the skill as "Melee Combat (Unarmed) 7/16," the first number being the skill level and the second number being the total of skill and controlling attribute.

Skill Tests: All skill tests are versus the total of skill and controlling attribute.

Unskilled Tests: Characters may try to use skills for which they have no training by making a test versus the controlling attribute alone at one difficulty level higher than normal. For example, Sylvia wants to shoot a morlock with a pistol, but has no Small Arms skill. She has a STR of 6, and is shooting at Medium range, normally a Difficult: Small Arms test. Since she is using a skill she doesn't have, the test defaults to STR and rises one level of difficulty to Formidable. This means that the test is made against half of her STR (rounding down), and she has to roll a 3 or less to hit.

Attribute Tests: Referees should be careful in assigning difficulties for attribute tests, since these stats normally only range from 1 to 10. Note, for example, that Melee Combat Agility tests have been adjusted for this reason.

Unarmed Combat Damage: Use only the basic skill level, not the total of attribute and skill, when multiplying

times STR in the Unarmed Combat Damage formula.

Attribute and Skill Maximums: Attributes are limited to a maximum of 10 (unless changed by super-science or unnatural powers, like cyborging). Skills have no maximum limit; you can improve a skill to as high a level as the players desire and the referee will allow.

D20 System Combat Notes

In the original D10 combat system, a roll of 9 or 10 resulted in an automatic miss when using missile weapons. In the new D20 system, a roll of 17-20 results in an automatic miss when using missile weapons.

D20 System Task Difficulty Levels

A few comments are worth making concerning the revised task difficulty levels for the new D20 system. Whenever the term "skill" is used in context of a task, it means the total of the attribute and skill combined unless otherwise specified. The ranges for Easy, Average, and Difficult tasks have been effectively made one level lower in difficulty than before; Easy becomes equal or less than 4x skill, rather than merely 2x, and so on. The purpose of this is to bring the task names more in line with what players would expect. Now, a character with a skill level of 10 is virtually assured of success at an Average task, unless an automatic failure roll occurs.

Converting old difficulty levels to new ones is simply a matter of comparing the old and new target numbers. For example, under the old system, climbing a sheer rock face with good handholds was an Average task; that is, the roll was made against the base Climbing skill. Under the D20 system, a roll against the base skill+attribute is a Difficult task, so climbing a sheer rock face with good handholds becomes a Difficult task.

Automatic Success/Failure: Under the D20 system, a natural roll of 1 always succeeds, and a natural roll of 20 always fails, regardless of skill level. This gives characters a small chance of success even at the absolute worst of times, and of failure even at the absolute best of times. Both of these are intellectually satisfying, and bring an element of tension to the simplest of situations.

Outstanding Success: A roll of 10 points or more below the target number results in an Outstanding Success. The effects of an Outstanding Success are decided by the referee, unless specified by the rules.

Catastrophic Failure: This is the opposite of Outstanding Success. If a character fails in a task by at least



10, roll again. If the character fails again, a Catastrophic Failure has occurred (if the character succeeds on the second roll, then the task is a regular failure). The effects of a Catastrophic Failure are decided by the referee, unless specified by the rules.

Combat Task Levels: While tasks in general have become more easy for characters to accomplish in the D20 system, combat tasks worked very well under the D10 system. To maintain the same percentages of success and failure in this area, the task difficulty names have been increased one level, as summarized on the appropriate task difficulty tables.

D20 System: Task Difficulty Levels

Level	Roll (1D20)
Easy	$\leq 4 \times (\text{Skill} + \text{Attribute})$
Average	$\leq 2 \times (\text{Skill} + \text{Attribute})$
Difficult	$\leq (\text{Skill} + \text{Attribute})$
Formidable	$\leq \frac{1}{2} \times (\text{Skill} + \text{Attribute})$
Impossible	$\leq \frac{1}{4} \times (\text{Skill} + \text{Attribute})$
*Round fractions down	

Additional Note Concerning NPCs

Remember to add the attribute and skill of NPC skill levels.

Willpower Effects on Empathic Power Levels

When calculating Willpower effects on empathic power levels, only subtract the target's combined Willpower+INT if it actually has at least 1 point of Willpower skill. For targets that have no Willpower skill (this includes targets that have had their Willpower depleted by Willpower Drain), no subtraction is made.

Melee Combat Rules Additions

Quick Kill Rule: An Outstanding Success in an Armed or Unarmed Melee Combat roll (or a roll of 1 if the attacker has any appropriate skill at all, but too low to get an Outstanding Success) cripples the body area that is hit by the damage. If hit in the head, torso, or abdomen, an NPC is dead or critically wounded. Since surprise attacks automatically hit, roll anyway to see if the hit is an Outstanding Success (Average: Unarmed or Armed Combat).

Nonlethal Melee Combat: Sometimes it's more im-

portant to knock someone out than it is to kill them. This can be done with a number of blunt weapons (unarmed combat, axe, club, garrote, hatchet, machete, nunchucks, quarterstaff, sai, spear, sword, tonfa). Nonlethal combat is conducted in the same method as normal lethal combat, but the combatant using it must declare nonlethal blows. These blows cause no real physical damage; any damage they cause is checked off as damage, but goes away after the victim is rendered unconscious (head, torso, or abdomen receives enough damage to be "Critical"). Causing nonlethal damage is a normal Melee Combat task with unarmed combat, club, nunchucks, quarterstaff, or tonfa. With axe, garrote, hatchet, machete, sai, spear, or sword, it is one level of difficulty greater.

Ranged Combat

Targeted Shots: Aimed shots can be aimed at specific target areas, at one level of difficulty greater. Only aimed shots may be targeted; if multiple shots are fired, any shots after the first (or the first three if using a laser scope and within 40 meters) roll randomly to see what locations they hit, if they hit. For instance, a sniper at Medium range aiming at a target's head would have a Difficult: Small Arms task (Difficult for Medium range, modified to Average for aiming, further modified back down to Difficult for targeting a specific location). Subsequent shots in the same action would be counted as unaimed, striking random hit locations.

This option may also be used for antivehicle fire, assuming that the aiming action indicates that the firer is bracing and carefully aiming for a specific point on the target. If successful, the firer may choose the area hit, which determines the armor coverage and the appropriate sub-table—the actual amount of damage done to the vehicle still depends on the AV versus Penetration result on the Vehicle Damage Resolution Chart (Dark Conspiracy, pages 114 and 328). If multiple damage results are indicated, both hit the targeted area.

Full Automatic Fire: To determine hits in a burst of fully automatic fire, roll 1D20 for each round in a given burst (the size of the burst is indicated in the ROF column of the firing charts for a given weapon), treating each round fired as an Impossible (i.e., $\frac{1}{4}$ chance to hit) Small Arms skill test to hit. Range considerations reduce the total number of dice rolled in a burst, according to the existing autofire rule. Characters may fire up to five bursts a turn, as limited by recoil and their own judgment.

D20 SYSTEM: COMMON TASK SUMMARY

Empathy Tasks

<i>Situation</i>	<i>Task Difficulty</i>
Total Security	Easy
Relaxed Environment	Average
Normal Stress	Difficult
Great Stress, Combat	Formidable
Incredible Stress	Impossible

Revised D20 Empathic Power Level Table

<i>Power Level*</i>	<i>Stage</i>
0 or less	No Effect
1-9	Basic Success
10-17	Stage Two
18-27	Stage Three
28-36	Stage Four
37-45	Stage Five
46 or more	Stage Six

*Empath's EMP Attribute + Skill Level + 1D10 - (Target's Willpower + INT)

COMBAT TASKS

Unarmed Melee

<i>Attack Type</i>	<i>Difficulty</i>	<i>Skill</i>	<i>Effect</i>
Strike	Difficult	Melee Combat (Unarmed)	Damage
Block	Formidable	Melee Combat (Unarmed)	Avoid Strike/Lose Action
Aimed Strike	Formidable	Melee Combat (Unarmed)	Damage Chosen Location
Grapple	Average	Agility	Controlling "Hits"
Strangling	Average	Agility	Controlling "Hits"/Damage
Escape	Average	Agility	Remove Controlling "Hits"
Avoid Diving Blow	Average	Agility	Avoid Diving Blow

Armed Melee

<i>Attack Type</i>	<i>Difficulty</i>	<i>Skill</i>	<i>Effect</i>
Attack	Difficult	Melee Combat (Armed)*	Damage
Block	Formidable	Melee Combat (Armed)**	Avoid Strike/Lose Action
Aimed Attack	Formidable	Melee Combat (Armed)	Damage Chosen Location

*Some weapons have die modifiers.

**Must have object to block with.

Thrown Weapon

<i>Attack Type</i>	<i>Difficulty</i>	<i>Skill</i>	<i>Effect</i>
Throw	Difficult	Thrown Weapon	Damage
Throw, Long Range	Formidable	Thrown Weapon	Damage

Direct Fire Combat

<i>Attack Type</i>	<i>Difficulty</i>	<i>Skill</i>	<i>Effect</i>
Fire, Short Range	Average	Small Arms	Damage
Fire, Medium Range	Difficult	Small Arms	Damage
Fire, Long Range	Formidable	Small Arms	Damage
Fire, Extreme Range	Impossible	Small Arms	Damage
Fire, Quick	+1 Level	Small Arms	Damage
Fire, Target Obscured	+1 Level	Small Arms	Damage
Fire, Automatic	*	*	Damage

*See Automatic Fire rules

Small Arms = Appropriate Small Arms skill



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Look Who's Coming Back For Seconds...

Lester W. Smith

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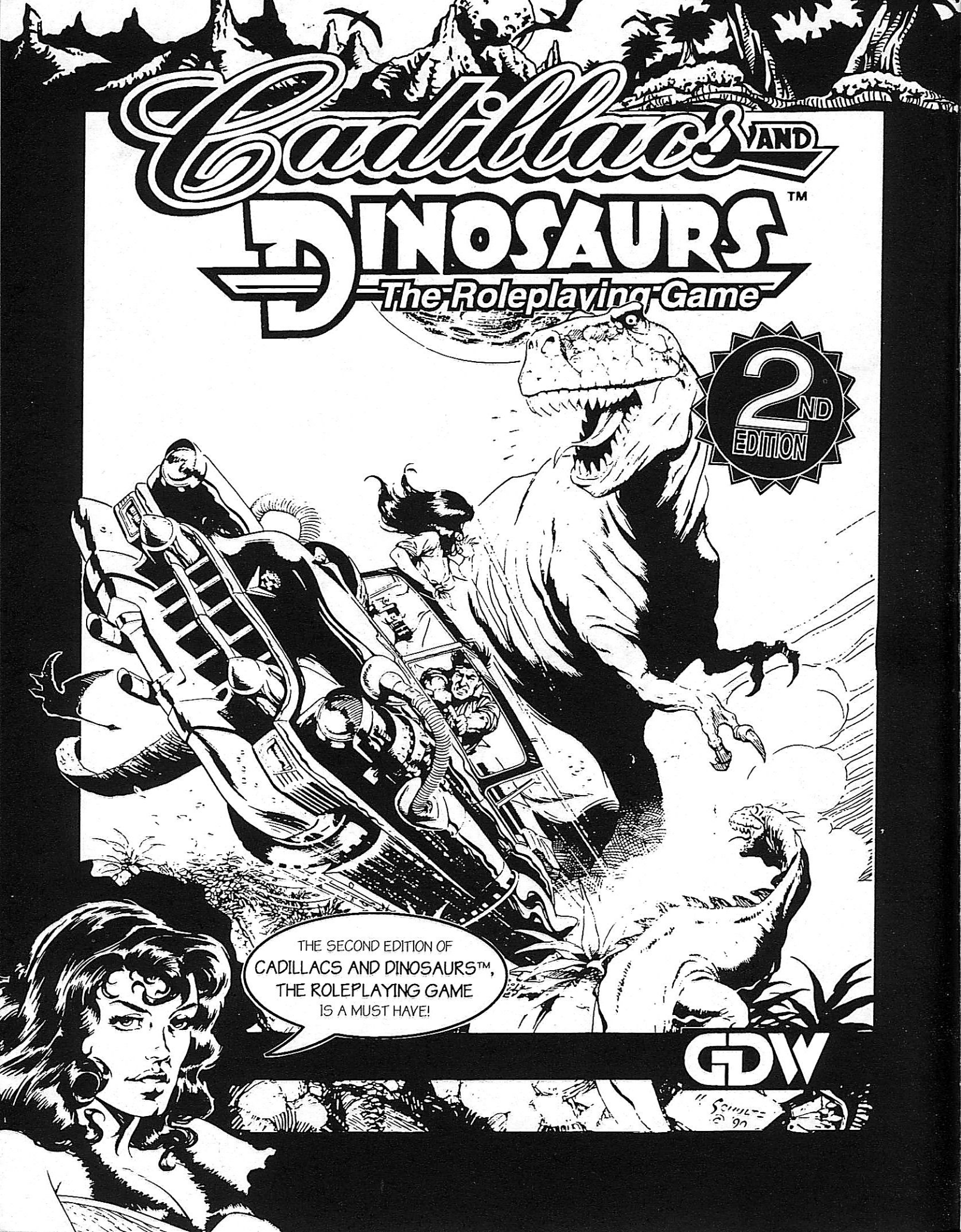
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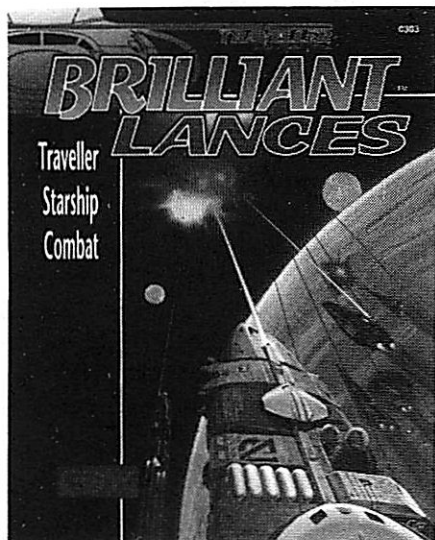
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Brilliant Lances™: Traveller Starship Combat

Here it is, the game that brings science-fiction roleplaying and starship combat into one realm. This detailed space combat system allows Traveller players to resolve ship combat in detail never before possible, where each action depends upon the skill of the character crewmember. Is your character a sensors wizard, a communications maestro, or an engineering marvel? In **Brilliant Lances**, a ship is only as good as its crew. Technology and equipment are the tools, but in the final analysis, it is people that make the difference.

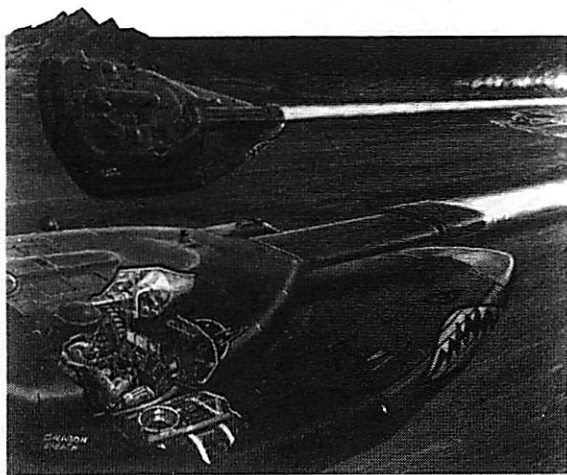
October

Traveller: The New Era Referee's Screen

This referee's screen brings you the most commonly used charts and tables in an easily used format, plus handy character generation player aids cards, and a complete TNE adventure that takes you from the heart of a courageous pocket empire to the deadliest challenge provided by the New Era. What more do you want, a laser pistol?

Traveller: The New Era Player Forms

This book presents a collection of forms that will be useful to all Traveller players and referees, conveniently perforated for immediate use. Character sheets and worksheets, NPC and ammo forms, ship design worksheets, hit location worksheets, blank ship data profiles, animal encounter forms, subsector data forms and others are all here.



November

Fire, Fusion, and Steel™: Traveller Technical Architecture

What do you want to make? Starships? Tanks? Rifles, pistols, cannons, laser turrets? It's in there. Do you want to build customized personal armor? Battle dress? It's in there. What about guided missiles, fusion guns, meson guns, nuclear dampers, airplanes, satellites, lifeboats? It's in there. How do you want to power it? Fusion plant? Batteries, power cell, capacitors? It's in there. Other game systems give you equipment catalogs; **Traveller** gives you the factory.

Deluxe Traveller: The New Era

Deluxe TNE gives you the **Traveller: The New Era** rulebook, **Fire, Fusion, and Steel**, plus useful player aids cards and other resources all in a nice big box. And, if you've already bought the other items separately, you don't have to buy them again to get the other goodies—they will all be available separately.

Challenge Magazine

Your first source for up-to-the-minute **Traveller** coverage is **Challenge** magazine. **Challenge** brings you new TNE adventures, answers to **Traveller** questions, **Traveller News Service** reports, plus designer's notes and articles about the reasons and research behind the New Era.

Traveller: The New Era 1994

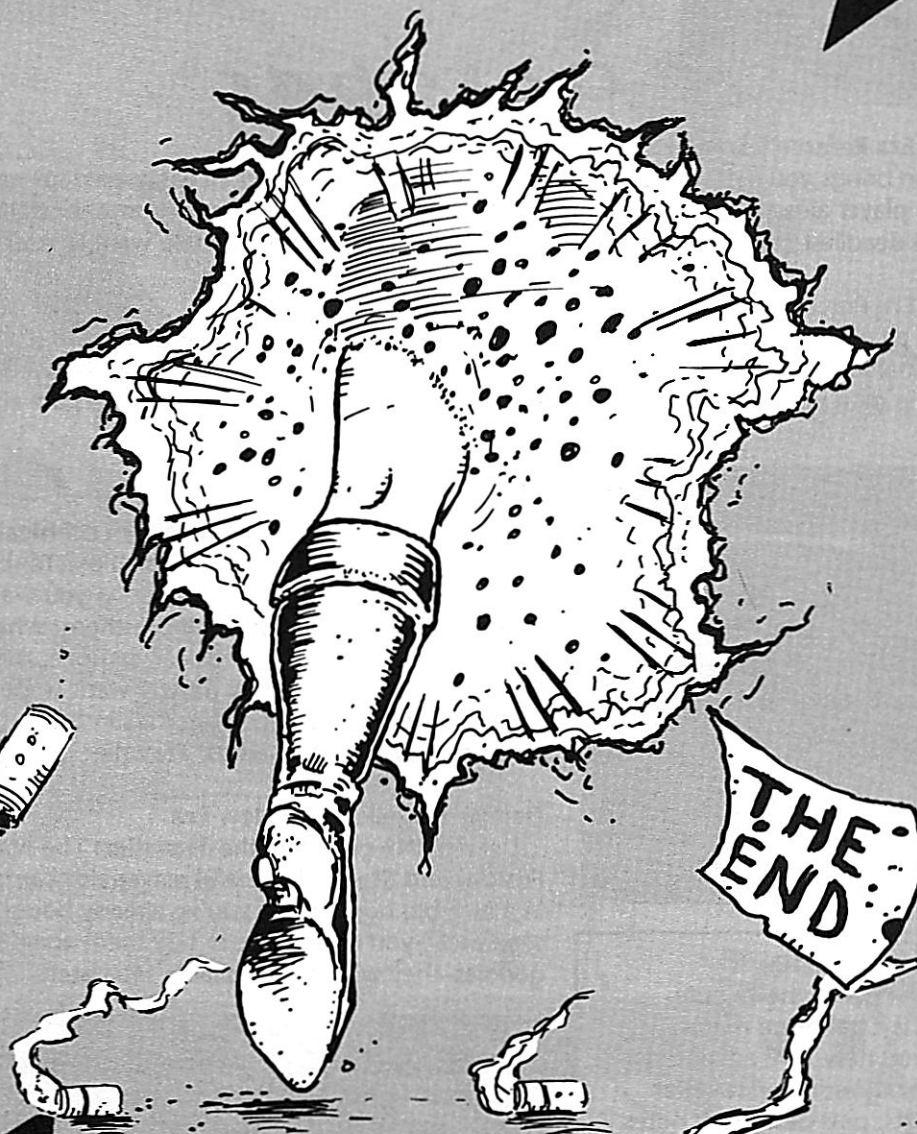
Keep an eye out for **Smash and Grab**, the **Star Viking Sourcebook**, the **RCES Handbook to the Aurora-Class Clippers**, and more. Latest news on all of this is in **Challenge**, where else?

Ted Kocot and Loren Wiseman

DIMENSIONS - PRO

Sourcebook, Volume 1

MT



DARK CONSPIRACY

I don't think we're in Kansas anymore...this looks more like
Pittsburg as painted by Hieronymous Bosch..."

How do you open a portal to another place? How do people use proto-dimensions for rapid movement to a location miles away. If there is such a thing as a doorway to another reality, can it be locked? Why is it easier to dimension walk from Demonground? Are there safe havens in the proto-dimensions? Where did the proto-dimensions come from? Are there other worlds in the proto-dimensions, other races—allies or enemies? What are the Plaguelands?

These questions, and many others, will be answered in **The Proto-Dimensions Sourcebook, Volume 1**. There are rules for proto-dimensional travel by means of empathic power or by the use of technological devices far beyond the ability of humans to create. All the details of dimension-walking are covered, telling how to travel to worlds not our own, and how to stay alive while doing it. Players will learn how to build an interdimensional portal—or how to destroy one.

Further, **The Proto-Dimensions Sourcebook** describes 12 different proto-dimensions, ranging from tropical paradise to a sulphurous hell, from the vastness of a perpetual sky to surreal landscapes populated by creatures from out of a nightmare, from a world where everything is normal except for the color to a world where nothing is what it seems.

If you are a **Dark Conspiracy** referee, you will be able to incorporate the proto-dimensions into your campaign with relative ease. If you are a player, your character can now take the battle to the enemy's backyard.

PROTO- DIMENSIONS™

GDW: 2109 \$14



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